Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qurʾan

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Tawus Raja

Volume 29 (Chapters 23-25)
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In the Name of God,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

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O' God! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

This translation of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, which corresponds to the Arabic volume 15, is our second edition which follows the first published in 2016. The English volume 29 covers the *tafsīr* of three complete chapters, Sūrah al-Muʾminūn (Chapter 23), Sūrah al-Nūr (Chapter 24) and Sūrah al-Furqān (Chapter 25).

In this volume, the author discusses the effects of faith and its practical application in the light of verses 23:1-2. From this study issues a sociological and judicial discussion which covers the laws of Islam and their significance for human society. This is followed by a discussion on the meaning of God's causation of things.

We would like to thank all the individuals and scholars who helped in this project and provided the translator with constructive feedback. In particular, we are indebted to Mubarak Sami and Zainab Karim for reviewing and editing the entire manuscript. Needless to say, the translator bears complete responsibility for any mistakes or shortcomings in this work.

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January 2021

About the Translator

Tawus Raja is an independent translator who has studied Qurʾanic exegesis and Islamic philosophy not through formal university or seminary education. His other works include Shining Sun: In Memory of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī (London: ICAS Press, 2011), Divine Flashes of Ḥusayn (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2011) by Āyatullāh Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī, and Treatise on Spiritual Journeying and Wayfaring (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2013) by ʿAllāmah Baḥr al-ʿUlūm.

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About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers, particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313–80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known

1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam.* The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 23

al-Muʾminūn (The Believers)

Verses 1-11

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

Sūrah al-Muʾminūn (The Believers) was revealed in Mecca and consists of 118 verses. This chapter calls to believing in God and in the Last Day. It distinguishes the believers from the disbelievers by presenting the beautiful manifestations of servitude in the former, against the moral vices and evil deeds of the latter. The chapter then gives glad tidings to the believers, and warnings to the disbelievers. These warnings involve a mention of punishments in the hereafter, as well as God's worldly punishments that uprooted the previous nations who rejected the call of truth, backdating from the time of Noah to the time of the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary. The content of the chapter shows that it was revealed in Mecca.

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قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۝١

(23:1) *Successful* (aflaḥa, from falḥ) *indeed are the believers* (al-muʾminūn, from īmān).

Al-Rāghib says (summarized):

> *Falḥ* means *shaqq* (to split, to crack). It is said that "iron is split (*yuflaḥu*) by iron." *Falāḥ* means "victory, success, achieving one's goal." There are two types of *falāḥ*: worldly and otherworldly. Worldly *falāḥ* is gaining what helps, facilitates and enhances one's life in this world, such as health, wealth and honor. Otherworldly *falāḥ* consists of four things: life without death, wealth without need, honor without humiliation, and knowledge without ignorance. That is why it has been said, "There is no [real] pleasure except that of the hereafter."

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Success is called *falāḥ* (lit. "splitting") because it splits the barriers and cracks open one's intended objective.

Īmān (belief, faith) is "to admit and confirm a statement and abide by its implications." In Qur'anic terminology, *īmān* means: to accept God's Oneness, His messengers and their teachings, and the reality of the Last Day, accompanied by obedience [to God and His religion] in general. That is why we see that whenever the Qur'an praises a positive quality of the believers, or describes one of their lofty rewards in the hereafter, it couples belief with righteous deeds. For example: *Whoever does good, whether male or female, and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a good life* (16:97), *[As for] those who believe and do good, a good final state shall be theirs and a goodly return* (13:29), and numerous other verses.

Merely acknowledging something is not considered having *īmān* in it, until the acknowledgement is accompanied by observing its requirements and implications in practice. This is because there are two elements in *īmān*:

(1) knowing about something; and

(2) having conviction and confidence toward it.

Having conviction toward something necessitates abidance by its implications, unlike having knowledge of something, which can be devoid of conviction and observance. For example, many individuals are addicted to evil deeds or harmful habits, and whereas they admit the evil or harm in their actions, they do not quit, using the excuse of addiction. Similarly, God says [about the Pharaoh and his people's denial of God's clear signs]: *And they denied them unjustly and proudly while their soul had been convinced of them* (27:14).

Having said that, it is possible for *īmān* to be accompanied by disobedience toward *some* of its requirements due to personal impediments and/or pleasant attractions. However, *īmān* cannot be *completely* devoid of obedience as its implication.

الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ﴿٢﴾

(23:2) *Who are humble* (khāshiʿūn, from khushūʿ) *in their prayer.*

Khushūʿ is a specific emotional state of a person who is dominated and defeated by a mighty being, such that it disconnects the person from everything else and directs his attention only to that mighty being. *Khushūʿ* is apparently a state of the heart, but based on some viewpoints, it is also ascribed to other organs and members. This extension of the meaning of *khushūʿ* is seen in the Prophetic narration about a person who was playing with his beard in prayer: "Had his heart been humble (*khashaʿa*), his limbs would have also been humble." Another example is the verse: *And the voices shall be low* (khashaʿat) *before the Beneficent God* (20:108).

The above is a comprehensive definition of humility which incorporates all other suggested meanings of the term by other exegetes, such as:

(1) a feeling of awe accompanied by serenity of limbs;
(2) lowering one's gaze and being humble in behavior;
(3) bowing one's head [in humility];
(4) being focused and not turning right or left;
(5) glorifying God's position and focusing one's attention on Him;
(6) demonstrating one's subservience.

These eight verses [23:2-23:9] describe the qualities of the believers that are necessary outcomes of their belief being alive and active. It is such faith that will bring about what is meant for *īmān* to bring about: salvation. Prayer is when one who has nothing but need and humiliation turns one's attention toward the Threshold of Magnificence and Greatness, and toward the Source of Might and Glory: God. A person who is conscious of God's position will necessarily be impressed by it, as he finds himself immersed in a feeling of humiliation and abasement before His Lord. This will sever his heart from any attachment or engagement that is of no significance in what he is facing [that is, his eternal life]. If one's belief is genuine, then it will concentrate his focus on one thing alone whenever he turns to his Lord. He will not be distracted by anything else, as he is completely absorbed by his Lord. After all, how does a beggar react when he faces a rich person whose wealth cannot be measured? And what does a helpless person behave when he faces the Absolute Might that can never be tainted by humility and humiliation?

This idea [of faith having outward effects] is seen in a tradition where the Prophet says to Ḥārithah b. al-Nuʿmān, "Surely there is a sign for every truth, and there is a light for every right."[1]

The Impact of Belief

As we have pointed out more than once, religion is a social institution that shapes a person's social life in this world. Social institutions are accompanied by practices that are based on beliefs concerning the reality of the world of existence, a part of which is humankind. The differences between various social institutions are typically because of their different views concerning these matters. For instance:

Suppose the people in a society believe that the universe has a Lord by Whom it has been created and to Whom it will return to, and that humankind has an eternal life which is untouched by death or destruction. Then, the daily actions and interactions of these people will incorporate a

1 Reported in *al-Kāfī* and other books of hadith.

consideration of eternal life and everlasting otherworldly pleasures.

Suppose the people in a society believe that the universe has one or multiple gods that conduct its affairs according to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, but they do not believe in returning to their lord(s) [in hereafter]. Life in this society will be directed at seeking nearness to these gods and pleasing them, in order to benefit from material well-being and gain desired worldly pleasures.

Suppose the people in a society neither believe in God, nor in the eternal life of humankind, such as the materialists and others with the same mindset. Then, the social rules and customs of this society will be based on maximizing material pleasure in the life of this world, which ends by death.

As we see, religion is a practical tradition that is founded on a set of principles and worldviews (*ʿaqīdah*, *iʿtiqād*), including an understanding of the humankind as a part of the world. The principles and worldviews in religion are not purely in the form of theoretical knowledge about the universe and humankind, because theoretical knowledge does not necessitate any practice by itself, even though practice hinges on theory. Rather, religious worldview is the knowledge and realization that one *should* follow the practical implications of a certain theory. In other words, it is when one decides to follow and abide by the practical implications of some theoretical knowledge. This is called practical knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ʿamalī*). One example of such decision is to say: It is incumbent upon humankind to worship God, and to observe the practices that ensure human happiness in both this world and the hereafter.

Now, what does it mean to have *īmān* (faith, belief) in a religion? Given that religion is a practical tradition based on a certain worldview and cosmology, when a religious call promotes *īmān* it is promoting commitment to the practical implications of true belief in God, His messengers and their teachings, and the Last Day. Hence, *īmān* is a form of practical knowledge.

Practical knowledge can either be strong or weak in terms of intensity, according to the strength or weakness of its incentives and motivations. We never perform an act unless there is an incentive or disincentive: to gain a benefit or to avoid a loss. It sometimes happens that one incentive pulls us toward a certain act, but then we are diverted from the act due to another incentive that is stronger and more influential than the first. For example, one feels the necessity to eat food in order to satiate his hunger, but sometimes he would not do so—if he realizes that the food is not good for his health. In this case, the second incentive qualifies and constrains the unconditionality of the first incentive. It can be explained more simply as follows: eating to fulfill one's hunger is not absolutely necessary under all

circumstances whatsoever, but it is necessary only when it does not harm one's health.

Similarly, the belief (*īmān*) in God will have its effects—such as righteous deeds and splendid moral traits like awe, humility and sincerity—only if it is not overcome by wrong incentives and devilish deceptions. In other words, belief will be effective if it is not conditional or circumstantial, as God says: *And among men is he who serves Allah (standing) on the edge* (22:11).

Hence, a believer will only be an absolute and unconditional believer when his actions are in accordance to the implications of his belief. Some of these implications are humility in worship, abstinence from vanity, and so on.

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وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(23:3) *And who keep aloof* (muʿriḍūna, from iʿrāḍ) *from what is vain* (al-laghw).

An action is called vain (*laghw*) if there is no benefit in it. This can differ according to the different types of benefit. For example, an act might be vain in one respect, but beneficial and useful in another.

From the point of view of religion, vain acts are permissible acts that: (1) have no benefit in the hereafter, and (2) have no benefit in this world in a way that would continue to the hereafter. An example of such acts would be eating and drinking for the pleasure of it, as opposed to eating and drinking to gain strength to serve God. Therefore, if an action neither benefits one in the hereafter nor in this world such that it somehow results in a benefit in the hereafter, then it is vain. To be more precise, a vain act is any action other than the obligatory and recommended acts (*wājibāt* and *mustaḥabbāt*).

The verb used in this verse is *iʿrāḍ* (to turn away, to keep aloof), as opposed to *tark* (to avoid, to quit, to desert). God does not say that the believers "avoid" vain acts in an absolute sense, because after all, humankind is always subject to slip and mistake, and God pardons the lesser sins as long as they avoid the major ones: *If you shun the great sins which you are forbidden, We will do away with your [lesser] evil deeds* (4:31). Instead, He has described the believers as those who "turn away" from vanity, which means that their overall direction is not toward vanity. *Iʿrāḍ* (turning away, keeping aloof) is an active decision, where one is being pulled toward an action, but he turns his face away from it because he does not care about

it and does not see it significant. This means that the person elevates his soul above base acts. He prefers to strive for greater objectives and more significant affairs, instead of simply engaging in matters that are contrary to nobility and goodness.

It is indeed most befitting of *īmān* (belief, faith) to inspire one toward such nobility, because it connects one to the Origin of Magnificence and Grandeur, and the Source of Nobility and Honor: God. A believer in this sense would not be concerned with anything except achieving an everlasting, timeless and happy life. Thus he would not engage himself in anything other than what God deems to be great, and would not have a high regard for what ignorant and ignoble people care about. *And when the ignorant address them, they say: Peace* (25:63); *And when they pass by what is vain, they pass by nobly* (25:72).

These verses show that their description as "those who keep aloof from vanity" is a way of describing the loftiness of their determination and the nobility of their souls.

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِلزَّكَاةِ فَاعِلُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(23:4) *And who are doers of charity* (al-zakāh).

Given the mention of prayer (*ṣalāh*) above [in verse 23:2], what is meant by *zakāh* here is also a ritual. Therefore, *zakāh* here is meant in its financial sense, which is paying the poor-rate or almsgiving, as opposed to *zakāh* in the sense of self-purification from moral vices. Meanwhile, it should be noted that this chapter was revealed in Mecca, while *zakāh* as a financial duty in Islam was legislated later in Medina. That was when *zakāh* gradually became a specific term, meaning the amount of money that one pays, and this specific meaning dominated the other meanings of the word. Therefore, it is more likely that *zakāh* here is meant as a verbal noun (*maṣdar*), meaning the *act* of purifying one's wealth by spending part of it in God's way, as opposed to the actual *amount* that is paid.

Given this sense of *zakāh*—as the *act* of charity and almsgiving—it makes sense to say that they are "doers" (*fāʿilūn*) of *zakāh*, as the verse does. It means that they are active in helping the poor financially. However, if *zakāh* is interpreted as the *actual money* that is paid, then one cannot say that they are *doers* of it, because money is not an action to be ascribed to a "doer." To amend this discrepancy, some exegetes who have chosen this sense of *zakāh*—as the money that is paid—have interpreted the verse as: "And who are doers of *paying* the *zakāh*," assuming that the word "paying" is omitted and implied in the verse. Other exegetes have tried to avoid this

discrepancy by interpreting *zakāh* as "purification of the soul from moral vices." That is to avoid interpreting the verse as, "They are doers of the poor-rate."

Saying that they are "doers" (*fāʿilūn*) of charity shows their special attention to this act, as opposed to saying that they are "fulfillers" or "payers" of charity. For example, when someone asks a person to drink water: if the person says, "I will be a *doer*," it conveys a higher degree of attention and determination to performing the act than if he says, "I will be a *drinker*."[1]

Belief in God is such that it calls one to financial charity. One cannot achieve total happiness unless one lives in a felicitous society where each person receives their due rights. And a society is not felicitous unless its classes are close to one another in terms of standard of living and quality of life. Giving financial charity to the poor and the less fortunate is one of the most effective ways of achieving this objective of equity.

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ ۝٥

(23:5) ***And who guard their private parts*** **(li-furūjihim)**.

Furūj is the plural of *farj*, which has been defined as "the body part in both men and women that one is ashamed of mentioning" (that is, private parts). "Guarding one's private part" means abstaining from sexual intercourse, which includes adultery, sodomy, intercourse with animals, and other such forms of it.

إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ ۝٦

(23:6) ***Except before their mates*** **(azwājihim)** ***or those whom their right hands possess, for they surely are not blameable.***

This verse mentions an exception to guarding the private parts. *Azwāj* means lawful wives. "*Those whom their right hands possess*" refers to their bondswomen. The believers are not blameable in sleeping with their lawful wives and/or slave girls.[2]

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1 This is a subtle distinction that rather applies to Arabic specifically. It is based on the word *fāʿil* (doer, actor) conveying a more active sense of fulfilling a task than the subject form of other verbs. (Trans.)

2 Although this verse primarily describes believing men, the entire verses are about all believers, both male and female. Therefore, it can be inferred that the same standard holds for believing women: they do not sleep with any man who is unlawful to them. For any differences between men and women in this

فَمَنِ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ ﴿٧﴾

(23:7) *But whoever* (fa-man) *seeks to go beyond that, these are they that exceed the limits.*

This verse is mentioned as a consequence and conclusion that builds on the exception in the previous verse, as indicated by the letter *fāʾ* (lit. "so, then, therefore"; translated as "but" here). That is, belief necessitates the absolute guarding of their private parts except with two groups of women: wives and bondswomen. Then, those who seek to go beyond that—that is, those who seek to have intercourse with anyone who is not among the lawful ones—they are transgressors and violators of the limit that God has defined for them.

We already presented a discussion on how adultery (*zinā*) destroys and ruins the human species under the verse: *And go not nigh to fornication; surely it is an indecency and an evil way* (17:32).[1]

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ ﴿٨﴾

(23:8) *And those who are keepers* (rāʿūn, from riʿāyah) *of their trusts* (li-amānātihim) *and their covenant* (ʿahdihim).

Amānah is originally a verbal noun (meaning the act of "entrustment"), but sometimes it refers to the thing that is entrusted to someone, such as money. This second sense is meant in this verse. *Amānāt* is in plural form in this verse, apparently referring to the different types of trust among the people. Some have suggested that it includes not only entrustment between the people, such as entrusting each other with wealth and possession, but also God's trust to human beings, which includes:

(1) God's covenants and rules that people must follow; and

(2) the body parts, organs and faculties that one should use in a way that pleases God.

However, this interpretation is an unlikely possibility given the primary meaning of the words, although it is true once we analyze and generalize the meaning.

In the shariah, *ʿahd* (covenant) is when one commits to something by uttering a prescribed formula. It stands parallel to *nadhr* (vow) and *yamīn* (oath). However, *ʿahd* could also include any duty that has been laid upon

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regard, one should refer to Islamic jurisprudence. (Trans.)

1 See volume 25, pp. 114ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

a believer. This usage can be seen in the verses: *Is it not that whenever they made a covenant, a party of them would cast it away?* (2:100), and: *And certainly they had made a covenant with Allah before, that they would not turn (their) backs; and Allah's covenant shall be inquired of* (33:15). In these verses and other similar verses, the words covenant (*ʿahd*) and contract (*mīthāq*) refer to having a belief that is coupled with observance of the practical duties prescribed by God. Perhaps the singular form of *ʿahd* [in the current verse] implies this very meaning [of God's covenant with humankind]: all religious duties are included in a single covenant which is that of *īmān* (belief, faith).

Riʿāyah means *ḥifẓ* (to preserve, to maintain). Some have said:

The root word *raʿy* originally means "to protect an animal," either by giving it the food that it needs to survive or by defending it against its enemies. However, in terms of usage, the root *raʿy* is used for any kind of protection and maintenance.

The opposite is arguably more plausible.[1]

Either way, the verse describes the believers as those who preserve their trusts from being breached, and keep their covenants from being broken. Indeed *īmān* (belief, faith) calls for such attitude, because it involves a sense of composure, confidence and security. When one shows trust in a believer by leaving one's possession with him, or shows confidence in the person by making a contract with him, then that possession or contract will remain stable with him, and will be secure from loss and damage due to a breach of trust or a break of contract.

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَوَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾

(23:9) *And those who keep a guard on their prayers* (ṣalawātihim).

Ṣalawāt is the plural of *ṣalāh* (prayer). The verse talks about keeping a guard on the prayers, which means maintaining their number and order. That is, they are careful not to miss any of the obligatory prayers, and are constantly mindful of them. Again, this is a necessary consequence of *īmān*.

The verse says "prayers" in plural, while earlier we read "prayer" in singular: *Who are humble in their prayer* (23:2). This is because humbleness (*khushūʿ*) is a quality that equally applies to any prayer. Therefore, the singular form of "prayer" in that verse indicates genus (*jins*), which effectively includes all prayers.

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1 That is, it is more likely that the original meaning of the root was protection in general, but then it was applied to the protection of animals in particular. (Trans.)

أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْوَارِثُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(23:10) ***These are they who are the heirs,***

Paradise (*al-firdaws*) is the highest of the heavenly gardens. We discussed its meaning and some of its characteristics under the verse: *Their place of entertainment shall be the gardens of paradise* (18:107).[1]

الَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ الْفِرْدَوْسَ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١١﴾

(23:11) ***Who shall inherit the Paradise; they shall abide therein.***

This verse is an elaboration of "the heirs" in the previous verse. "Inheriting" Paradise is meant in the following sense: initially, anyone can earn and enter Paradise, but some people fail to do so. Thus they forfeit their potential share and chance, and instead, the believers become heirs to them. According to the narrations, each person initially has a place in heaven and in hell. If a person dies and enters hell, then the people of heaven will "inherit" his place in heaven. We will review these traditions in our examination of narrations below.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning "*Who are humble* (khāshiʿūna, from khushūʿ) *in their prayer*" (23:2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is to lower your gaze when you pray and to be focused on your prayer.

Author's comment: As we pointed out above, these qualities are some of the *consequences* of humbleness (*khushūʿ*). In other words, this narration defines humbleness by some of its implications. The same is seen in the next narration.

(2) [Imam] ʿAlī said: It [*khushūʿ*] is to not turn aside in your prayers.[2]

(3) The Messenger of God said: We deem any humility of the body that is beyond the humility of the heart as hypocrisy.[3]

Author's comment: A similar hadith is narrated from him in *al-Durr al-manthūr* as follows:

(4) The Messenger of God said, "Seek refuge in God from humility of hypocrisy." Then someone asked him, "What is humility of

1 See volume 26, pp. 272ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of several collections of hadith.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Mismaʿ b. ʿAbd al-Malik, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

hypocrisy?" He replied, "It is when the body appears to be humble while the heart is not."[1]

(5) The Prophet saw a man playing with his beard while praying. He said: If his heart were humbled, then his body parts would also be humbled.[2]

(6) It has been narrated that the Messenger of God used to raise his eyes toward the heaven when he prayed, but after the revelation of this verse [23:2], he kept his head lowered, and directed his gaze at the ground.[3]

Author's comment: The last two traditions are also narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of several collections of hadith. There are many other narrations about the meaning of *khushūʿ* (humility, humbleness).

(7) Concerning "*And who keep aloof from what is vain* (laghw)" (23:3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It means that when someone makes a false allegation against you or describes you by a quality that you are exempt from, you should turn away from him for the sake of God.[4]

(8) In another narration the Imam said: It [*laghw*] means chanting (*ghinā*) and instruments of diversion and distraction (*malāhī*).[5]

Author's comment: The last two narrations quoted from *Majmaʿ al-bayān* present some examples and applications [of *laghw*]. The next narration—quoted from *al-Irshād*—is a generalization of the term by analyzing its meaning:

(9) Imam ʿAlī said: Any speech in which there is no remembrance of God is vain (*laghw*).[6]

(10) Imam ʿAlī said: There are three ways in which a woman can become lawful for a man: (1) through a marriage that comes with inheritance; (2) through a marriage that comes without inheritance;[7] and (3) by means of slavery.[8]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of several collections of hadith, on the authority of Abū al-Dardāʾ.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

6 Al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād*.

7 The author has explained this below. In short, the first case is ordinary or permanent marriage, where the wife inherits from the husband in case he dies. The second case is temporary marriage. (Trans.)

8 *Al-Khiṣāl*, from Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, from his father, from his fathers.

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(11) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about temporary marriage (*mutʿah*). He said: It is permissible, but do not marry except a chaste woman. Indeed God says: *And who guard their private parts* (23:5). So do not place your private part[1] where you do not trust to place your money.[2]

Author's comment: This narration involves a generalization of the meaning of guarding one's private part, such that it also includes avoiding the marriage of an unchaste woman.

As one can see, the last two narrations count temporary marriage (*mutʿah*) as a form of marriage and wedlock. There are numerous narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt to this effect, and Shia jurisprudence is based on these narrations.

This is also confirmed by the Qur'an and what was practiced at the time of the Prophet. Besides the case of a bondswoman, there are two forms of sexual intercourse: either by marriage or adultery (*zinā*). God has made the latter unlawful and has emphasized its prohibition in many verses that were revealed both in Mecca and Medina. Some examples can be found in Chapters 25 (al-Furqān) and 17 (al-Isrāʾ) which are Meccan, and Chapters 24 (al-Nūr) and 60 (al-Mumtaḥinah) which are Medinite.

God has prohibited adultery as *sifāḥ* (fornication) in Chapters 4 (al-Nisāʾ) and 5 (al-Māʾidah). He (s.w.t) has also condemned and prohibited it as *faḥshāʾ* (indecency) in Chapters 7 (al-Aʿrāf), 29 (al-ʿAnkabūt), 12 (Yūsuf), 16 (al-Naḥl), 2 (al-Baqarah) and 24 (al-Nūr), where the first three [Chapters 7, 29 and 12] are Meccan, while the rest—or the last two—are Medinite.

God has also called adultery *fāḥishah* (indecency)[3] and has prohibited it in Meccan chapters like Chapters 7 (al-Aʿrāf), 6 (al-Anʿām), 17 (al-Isrāʾ), 27 (al-Naml), 29 (al-ʿAnkabūt), 42 (al-Shūrā) and 53 (al-Najm), as well as in Medinite chapters like Chapters 4 (al-Nisāʾ), 24 (al-Nūr), 33 (al-Aḥzāb) and 65 (al-Ṭalāq).

Furthermore, God has indirectly hinted at the prohibition of adultery in Chapter 23: *But whoever seeks to go beyond that, these are they that exceed the limits* (23:7). This verse also appears in Sūrah al-Maʿārij [70:31]. It was well known at the beginning of the Prophet's mission that wine and fornication

1 This part of the hadith means that you should be at least as cautious in marital and sexual matters as you are in financial matters. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Isḥāq b. Abī Sārah.

3 *Faḥshāʾ* and *fāḥishah* both mean "indecency," except that the first conveys a stronger and more emphasized meaning. (Trans.)

are unlawful in Islam.[1]

It is certain [from history] that temporary marriage was practiced [by Muslims] in Mecca before the Prophet's migration, and also for some time after that in Medina. If temporary marriage were not really a form of marriage, and if a temporary wife were not genuinely a lawful mate included in "*Except before their mates*" (23:6), then it means that the Muslims used to practice a form of adultery (*zinā*). This implies that temporary marriage was a form of adultery that the Prophet legalized due to some necessity at the time [in Mecca, and for some time in Medina]. Besides the Prophet's legalization, one can also infer the legalization of temporary marriage from the verse: *Then as to those whom you profit by, give them their dowries as appointed* (4:24).

What follows from the above thread is this: (1) Temporary marriage was initially viewed to be permissible. (2) This permissibility was then abrogated by verses such as the current verses of discussion: *Except before their mates or those whom their right hands possess… that exceed the limits* (23:6-7; also in 70:30-31). (3) Then, all the Meccan verses and some of the Medinite verses that prohibit adultery were abrogated as temporary marriage was legalized again, either by the Prophet's or by verse 4:24. This order of events specifically matches the word of some scholars, saying that the Prophet legalized and illegalized temporary marriage several times.[2] What this means is that the verses which prohibit adultery were abrogated, then reestablished, then abrogated and then reestablished (several times). However, no Muslim claims that these verses were abrogated even once, let alone many times. Is such abrogation and restatement anything but playing with the Book of God? The Prophet is far from such disrespect.

Furthermore, the tone and justifications found in the verses that prohibit adultery do not leave any room for abrogation. How could it be that God describes an action to be an abhorrent indecency [12:24] and "*an evil way*" (17:32), and state that its doer "*shall meet the requital of sin; the punishment shall be doubled to him on the day of resurrection, and he shall abide therein in abasement*" (25:68-69), yet He legalizes it later, then prohibits it and then

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1 This is according to what Ibn Hishām says in his *Sīrah* (biography of the Prophet). We quoted his account in our Discussion of Traditions under the verse: *Intoxicants and games of chance…* (5:90), in volume 6 of this book. (Auth.) See volume 11, pp. 160ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 We presented the narrations that suggest this in our Discussion of the Traditions under verse 4:24 in volume 4 of this book. (Auth.) See volume 8, pp. 124ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

legalizes it again? This is not logical, not to mention that it does not make sense for a hadith to abrogate the Qur'an.[1]

In addition, some of those who performed temporary marriage at the time of the Prophet were among his prominent Companions—those who were most careful about following the laws. How could it be that they asked permission from the Prophet to commit adultery? How come they did not find it to be reprehensible? How could they accept such disgrace and dishonor? For instance, Zubayr had a temporary marriage with Asmāʾ b. Abī Bakr, who then gave birth to ʿAbd-Allāh b. Zubayr and ʿUrwah b. Zubayr, both of whom inherited from Zubayr after his assassination. All of them [Zubayr and his two sons] were among the Prophet's Companions.

Moreover, the narrations regarding the Prophet's prohibition of temporary marriage are self-contradictory. The narrators of history and hadith have unanimously reported that ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb prohibited temporary marriage during his caliphate. This account refutes the above narrations which say that the Prophet prohibited temporary marriage and abrogated its previous permissibility. We discussed this topic in our exposition of the verse: *And lawful for you are (all women) besides those, provided that you seek (them) with your property, taking (them) in marriage not committing adultery. Then as to those whom you profit by, give them their dowries as appointed; and there is no blame on you about what you mutually agree after what is appointed* (4:24).[2]

Here is a subtle indication that temporary marriage is a form of marriage, not adultery: the verse refers to it—where it says, "*Then as to those whom you profit by…*"—right after saying: *in marriage not committing adultery.*

The above discussion shows that in the language of the Qur'an and the shariah, *mutʿah* (temporary marriage) is indeed a form of marriage, not adultery or anything unlawful. This we cannot deny, whether we believe that it was abrogated later by the Qur'an or the Sunnah, as most Sunnis believe; or we say that it was not abrogated, as the Shias do, following their Imams of Ahl al-Bayt.

Hence, marriage is of two types:

(a) Permanent marriage, which has its own laws about the number of wives allowed, inheritance (*irth*), chastity (*iḥṣān*), obligatory expenses

1 This has been discussed and shown in the science of principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl*) such that it needs no further elaboration. (Auth.)

2 See volume 8, pp. 124ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

(*nafaqah)*, sleeping together (*firāsh*), ʿ*iddah*, and so on.[1]

(b) Temporary marriage, which is meant to be simpler. It has some of the laws of permanent marriage, such as: the wife exclusively belonging to the husband, the ascription of the children to the father [in terms of lawfulness, expenses and inheritance], and ʿ*iddah*.

This shows the incorrectness of the argument posited by some Sunni scholars, saying that *mutʿah* is not a form of marriage; because if it were so, then *mutʿah* would have had the same rules of marriage including number, inheritance, expenses, chastity, and so on. The flaw in this argument is that marriage is divided into two types: permanent and temporary, each of which has its own laws. Temporary marriage is based on simplicity and is governed by only *some* of those laws of permanent marriage, as we just mentioned.

Some have raised another objection: The purpose of legislating marriage is to continue the human race through the permanent relationship of the couple, while the goal that is served by *mutʿah* is only a fulfillment of the sexual need by the discharge of one's water. This is fornication (*sifāḥ*, lit. to shed), not marriage (*nikāḥ*), because it is only to fulfill the desire of shedding of one's water (*safḥ*).

The problem with this argument is that the continuation of the human race is a wisdom and benefit that ensues from marriage, not a *cause* of its legislation. Otherwise, marriage would have been unlawful for barren women, women who have reached menopause, and boys or girls who have not reached puberty yet [while it is not]. Furthermore, there is no contradiction between *mutʿah* and having children. This is seen in the case mentioned previously, of ʿAbd-Allāh and ʿUrwah, the two sons of Zubayr who were born from Asmāʾ b. Abī Bakr by *mutʿah*.

Some exegetes, like the author of *al-Manār*, have said: *Mutʿah* reduces the woman to a game and entertainment for men, just like a ball that rolls between players in ball games.

To answer this point, we should firstly note that it is first and foremost an objection against the Legislator [that is, God], for it is certain that *mutʿah*

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1 Permanent wives and husbands inherit from one another, as discussed in verse 4:12. *Iḥṣān* refers to the laws of chastity of the couple after marriage, and their penalty if they break it, as discussed in verses 4:15 and 4:25. *Nafaqah* refers to the obligatory living expenses of wife and children upon the man, as mentioned in verses 2:233 and 4:34. ʿ*Iddah* is the period of few months that a woman must wait after divorce or death of her husband before remarriage, as discussed in verses 2:228-2:232, 2:234-235, 33:49 and 65:1-7. It literally means "count" but it can be translated as "observation time" or "interim period." (Trans.)

was lawfully practiced for a period of time early in Islam. Whatever the Legislator says in this regard will also be our answer.

Secondly, all of what is sought in *mutʿah*—such as sexual pleasure, procreation and composure of mind—is common between man and woman, so there is no point in singling out women as being made objects of game and entertainment and not vice versa, unless one just wants to insist on his opinion.

There is more material on this topic, which shall be presented in an independent discussion, if God wills.

(12) Ibn Abī Malīkah says: I asked ʿĀʾishah about temporary marriage. She said, "Between me and you is the Book of God" and she recited: *And who guard their private parts, except before their mates* (azwājihim) *or those whom their right hands possess* (23:5-6), and she ended it by saying, "But whoever seeks anything beyond what God has given him in [permanent] marriage or by possession of right hand, he has exceeded the limits."[1]

Author's comment: A similar narration to this has been narrated by al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad [also in *al-Durr al-manthūr*]. Our discussion above should have clarified that one's partner in *mutʿah* is his wife (*zawj*, singular of *azwāj* in the verse) which is declared as lawful by these verse, as opposed to what the above narration says.

(13) Concerning "*But whoever seeks to go beyond* (ibtaghā warāʾ) *that*" (23:7) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It [*ibtaghā warāʾ*] means to transgresses and pass beyond.

(14) Concerning "*And those who keep a guard on their prayers*" (23:9) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means being watchful over their times and rules.

(15) Al-Fuḍayl b. Yasār says: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about God's words: *And those who keep a guard on their prayers* (23:9). He said, "It refers to the obligatory prayers (*farīḍah)*." Then I asked him about: *Those who are constant at their prayer* (70:23). He said, "It refers to the supererogatory prayers (*nāfilah)*."[2]

(16) The Prophet said: There is no one amongst you except that he has two homes: a home in Paradise and a home in hell. If he enters hell after his death, the people of Paradise will inherit his home there.[3]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it).

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Author's comment: A similar narration has been reported by al-Qummī in his *Tafsīr* as part of a long hadith, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr, from Imam al-Ṣādiq. We also presented another similar narration under the verse: *And warn them of the day of intense regret, when the matter shall have been decided* (19:39).[1]

A Social and Legal Discussion

What leads the people to establish certain laws in the society and induces them to abide by them is their realization that they have certain needs in life that can only be fulfilled by setting and practicing these laws. The more primary a need is and the closer it is to the simple human nature, the more urgent it will be to fulfill it, and the more detrimental it will be to neglect it. For example, the need to indulge in various types of foods and fruits comes nowhere close to the need for food in general. The same hierarchy holds for other needs.

One of these primary needs in human beings is the need of each of the two genders—the male and the female—to one another for sexual intercourse. Clearly from the point of view of the Creator [or creation], the purpose of this need is that the human race may continue. Thus He [or it] has endowed humankind with a sexual instinct in order to reach this objective. That is why we find marriage and the formation of households as a universal institution in all human societies that we see [today] or hear about [in past]. This has been the case since very ancient times, showing that the survival of the human race up to this point has depended on marriage.

You may object that the above view is not true because in the modern civilization, marriage is based on partnership in life, not based on procreation or satisfaction of the sexual need. The answer to this objection is that such partnership is not natural. Why not? Because if it were really a matter of partnership in life [and not sexual need], then these societies should have equally led to life partners of the same sex at a large scale.[2] This has not occurred exactly because of its opposition to what human nature calls for.

In short, marriage is a natural custom that has always existed in human societies. The only [main] obstacle in the way of this natural custom is *zinā* (adultery, fornication), for it is the greatest barrier against family formation,

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1 See volume 27, pp. 70-71 of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 Note that even if homosexuality becomes widespread as much as heterosexual relationships, it would still not refute the author's claim, because homosexual relationships in our societies are also based on sexual need, not a matter of mere life partnership. (Trans.)

which comes with heavy burdens to bear. The satisfaction of the sexual instinct through extramarital sex results in the destruction of families and the discontinuation of the human race.

That is why religious societies—in line with the pristine human nature—count adultery as a reprehensible act and an abominable indecency, and try to prevent it through any possible means. This can be seen even in modern societies: although they do not ban it completely and do not show the same opposition to it, they do not count it as something commendable either, because they can see its profound opposition to the formation of families, population growth and the subsistence of humankind. They try to minimize such relationships, and promote marriage and procreation through subtle ways like bonuses, child support, recognition and other incentives.

Nevertheless, we find in all countries, whether big or small, that some people turn to this act [adultery]—which is destructive to the foundation of the society—either openly or secretly, depending on the laws and customs of that society. This tendency exists despite the facts mentioned above, that: (1) permanent marriage is a legal institution which is accepted in all human societies in the world; (2) the governments encourage it; and (3) they discourage adultery and especially try to keep the youth away from it.

This is the strongest evidence that the practice of permanent marriage is not sufficient to satisfy the sexual instinct of humankind. It leaves a deficiency that must be fulfilled for humanity. Thus, it is mandatory for those who are in charge of legislation to ease and facilitate the matter of marriage further. This is why the Legislator of Islam has complemented permanent marriage by temporary marriage—in order to facilitate this matter. There are certain conditions for temporary marriage that prevent the unwanted consequences of adultery, such as the mixing of waters, destruction of the household, discontinuity of the human species, and problems concerning lineage, ascription and inheritance. These conditions are: (1) the wife exclusively belongs to her husband [during the marriage period]; (2) she must hold *ʿiddah* (a waiting period) after they part with one another; (3) the children count as legitimate children of the parents; (4) she is entitled to any conditions that she sets in marriage; and (5) the man does not have to carry the burdens and responsibilities of permanent marriage.

By the Truth, this is something to be proud of in Islam's simple and lenient code of law (shariah), just as many other Islamic laws like divorce and polygamy. But alas, for "*the signs and warners do not avail a people who cannot hear*" [10:101] to the point that some people say, "I prefer to commit adultery than to do temporary marriage."

Verses 12-22

Having discussed the success of the believers due to their excellent qualities, God continues these verses by describing the creation of humankind and His blessings upon them through His direction of their affairs; a direction that is inseparable from their creation. The verses show that He is the Lord and Sustainer of humankind and all things; thus He alone must be worshiped, without setting any partners for Him.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ طِينٍ ﴿١٢﴾

(23:12) *And certainly We fashioned* (khalaqnā, from khalq) *man* (al-insān) *of an extract* (sulālatin) *of clay.*

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> *Sulālah* is a noun for what is extracted from something, similar [in form] to *kusāḥah*, which is what is swept and gathered [that is, garbage].

The context suggests that "man" (*al-insān*) in this verse refers to the human species, including Adam and his entire progeny. *Khalq* (creation, fashioning) in the verse refers to the initial creation of this species, which started by Adam's creation from clay. His progeny then continued through *nuṭfah* (drop, seed, seminal fluid). Hence, this verse and the next one are equivalent to His words: *And He began the creation of man from clay. Then He made his progeny of an extract, of water held in light estimation* (32:7-8).

The above interpretation of the verse can be confirmed by the use of the verb *jaᶜl* (to make, to set, to place) in the next verse, as opposed to the verb *khalq* (to create, to fashion): *Then We made him* (jaᶜalnāhu, from jaᶜl) *a drop* (23:13). If these verses were only about Adam's progeny but not himself, then the verse should have said, "Then We fashioned him (*khalaqnāhu*, from *khalq*) a drop," just as it uses the verb *khalq* later: *Then We fashioned the drop a clot, so We fashioned the clot a lump of flesh* (23:14). Therefore, we cannot say that these verses are only about Adam's descendants, who are created from clay in the sense that their seed traces back to dust [in nature]. This should answer the exegetes who have interpreted "man" as the children of Adam, and also others who have interpreted it as Adam alone.

It is said that the root meaning of *khalq* is "to measure" (*taqdīr*). When one measures a fabric to make some garment out of it he says, "I have

measured the garment" (*khalaqtu al-thawb*). Therefore the meaning is: We measured and fashioned man first, from an extract from the parts of earth that was mixed with water [that is, clay].

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ ﴿١٣﴾

(23:13) Then We made him a drop (nuṭfatan) *in a firm resting-place* (qarārin makīn).

Nuṭfah means "little water." Sometimes it is used for water in general. In this verse, the word *qarār* (placement) means *maqarr* (resting place). This is a case of using a *maṣdar* (verbal noun, gerund, infinitive) instead of an *ism makān* (noun of place) to convey emphasis. The word *qarār* here refers to "the womb," which is the resting place of the *nuṭfah*. *Makīn* means *matamakkin* (firm, established). It is a quality of the womb, in the sense that the womb protects the drop against loss or damage, or in the sense that the drop is firmly placed in it.

The meaning is: Then We made man a drop in a firm and established place which is the womb, just as We first fashioned him from clay. In other words, We transformed his path of creation from that to this.

ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ ۚ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

(23:14) *Then We fashioned the drop a clot, so We fashioned the clot a lump of flesh, so We fashioned the lump of flesh bones, so We clothed the bones with flesh, then We caused it to grow into another creation, so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.*

The terms in this verse were discussed under verse (22:5) in the previous volume of the book.[1]

…We clothed the bones with flesh…: This is an elegant metaphorical expression.

…then We caused it to grow* (anshaʾnāhu, from inshāʾ) *into another creation…: According to al-Rāghib, *inshāʾ* means "to make and foster something," while *nashʾ* and *nashʾah* mean "to originate something and grow it." A youth of young age is called *al-nāshiʾ*.

1 See volume 28, p. 156 of the English translation. (Trans.)

This expression involves a change in the theme of the verse, because so far the verse was talking about *khalq* (creation, fashioning) but at this point it says, "*then We caused it to grow into another creation*" instead of saying, "then We fashioned it…" This transition is meant to indicate the onset of something new [in human creation] that was not included in, or accompanied by, the previous *material* stages. There is no such fundamental transition in the previous stages, such as the stage of creation of the clot (*ʿalaqah)*. Even though the clot does not have the same qualities as the drop (*nuṭfah)*—such as color, taste and so on—it nevertheless has the same *kind* of qualities. For example, the drop is white as opposed to the clot which is red; they are not the same but they are both colors. However, in the last stage of man's creation, what God makes to grow is a soul that has life, knowledge and power. This is the substantial essence of humankind, which we refer to by saying "I." There is no equivalent for the human soul in the previous stages of creation, including the stages of the drop, the clot, the lump of flesh and the bones that are covered with meat. There is nothing in those stages that would have attributes of life, power and knowledge. Hence it is a new origination that is made to grow from non-existence.

Given the flow of the verse, the pronoun "it" (or "him") in "*We caused it to grow*" (the letter *hāʾ* in *anshaʾnāhu*) refers to the human being that is fashioned into bones and clothed by flesh. It is this creature which is made to grow into another creation. It is transformed from a material body that is devoid of life, knowledge and power, to a being that has life, knowledge and power. It used to be a material being with material attributes and properties, but then it is transformed to be a being that differs from its previous state in terms of essence, attributes and properties. In a sense, it is the same material being that has transformed into a human being, and in a sense, it is not the same being because it differs from its previous state in its essence and attributes. This new creature has a kind of attachment and union with the previous matter; it uses the body as a tool and instrument to achieve its objectives, the way a writer uses a pen.

This idea can be deduced from verses like: *And they say: What! When we have become lost in the earth, shall we then certainly be in a new creation? Nay! They are disbelievers in the meeting of their Lord. Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you shall fully capture you* (32:10-11). What is fully captured upon death is the reality of the person, while what is lost and disintegrated in earth is the body. The two are not the same.

In connecting each new stage of creation to the previous stage, these verses sometimes use the letter *fāʾ* (so, and, then), and sometimes *thumma*

(then, thereafter).[1] According to some exegetes, *thumma* is used in cases where the new stage is completely different from the previous one, as in: *Then We made him a drop… Then We fashioned the drop a clot…then We caused it to grow into another creation* (23:13-14), while the letter *fā*ʾ is used in cases where there is no such gap and difference: *So We fashioned the clot a lump of flesh, so We fashioned the lump of flesh bones, so We clothed the bones with flesh* (23:14).

…so blessed be* (fa-tabāraka, from barakah) *Allah, the best of the creators* (al-khāliqīn, from khalq)*: Al-Rāghib says:

> The root meaning of *bark* is "the camel's breast"… When a camel sits down and places its knees on the ground, it is said: *baraka al-baʿīr*. That is why this root is used to convey a sense of stability and endurance…

A pond is called *birkah*. *Barakah* means "persistence and durability of divine good in something." He says: *We would certainly have opened up for them blessings* (barakātin) *from the heaven and the earth* (7:96). A blessing is called *barakah* because it involves durable good, just like water is fixed and stable in a pond. *Mubārak* is that which bears such good…

Since divine good emanates in a way that is beyond sensory observation, enumeration and limit, the words *mubārak* and *barakah* are used for anything that comes with unobservable abundance.

Therefore, when God is described as *tabāraka,* it refers to the abundant good that He gives and bestows upon His creatures, which is exclusive to Him. We mentioned above that the root meaning of the word *khalq* is "to measure." Hence, saying that God is *tabāraka* (blessed) as the best *khāliq* (Creator, Fashioner) means that His abundant good is found in His measurement, which is how He bestows existence to things. He is blessed because He fashions them with the right proportion between every part of each being, and between every being and other beings. This proportional measurement is the source of His abundant good.

The description of God as "*the best of the creators*" shows that the act of *khalq* is not one of His exclusive actions. This is confirmed by what was said above, that *khalq* is to measure something and compare it with something else, which is not something exclusive to Him. There are also verses in His Book which ascribe *khalq* (creation, measurement, fashioning) to beings other than Him, such as: *And when you [O Jesus] fashioned out of*

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1 In these contexts, *fā*ʾ and *thumma* both mean "then," as seen in most translations. The difference is that the letter *fā*ʾ indicates immediate sequence while *thumma* indicates lagged order. (Trans.)

clay a thing like the form of a bird (5:110), and: *And you create a lie* (29:17).

ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ لَمَيِّتُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(23:15) *Then after that you will most surely die.*

This verse shows that death is another stage that complements God's plan. It is inevitable for every human being to pass this stage in the path that has been measured and determined for them. Death is described as a sure and certain event, which we discussed under His words: *Every soul must taste of death and We try you by evil and good by way of probation* (21:35).[1]

ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ تُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(23:16) *Then surely on the day of resurrection you shall be raised.*

This is the last part of God's plan. Resurrection is the final stage in humankind's journey; once they reach it they will stay and abide there forever.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعَ طَرَائِقَ وَمَا كُنَّا عَنِ الْخَلْقِ غَافِلِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

(23:17) *And certainly We made above you seven ways (ṭarāʾiq); and never are We heedless of creation.*

In this verse, the "seven ways" are the seven heavens because they are "above you." They are called *ṭarāʾiq,* which is the plural of *ṭarīqah* (way, path), because they are the channels through which God's command descends to the earth. He says: *The command continues to descend among them [seven heavens]* (65:12), and: *He directs the affair from the heaven to the earth* (32:5). They are also the ways through which that the actions of people reach God, and the paths that the angels follow in their descent and ascent, as He says: *To Him do ascend the good words, and the good deeds lift them up* (35:10) and: *And we [angels] do not descend but by the command of your Lord* (19:64).

This clarifies the connection between the end of the verse—"*and never are We heedless of creation*"—and its beginning. What is said at the end is: You are not cut off from Us; you are not distant from Our supervision. Rather, there are seven ways that connect you to Us, through which Our messenger angels descend and ascend, Our command descends upon you, and your actions rise toward Us.

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1 See volume 28, p. 63ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

Some exegetes have said that *ṭarāʾiq* in the verse means "layers that are on top of one another"—a usage that is derived from *ṭuriqa al-naʿl*, which is said when shoes are laid on top of one another. Others have said that *tarīqah* here means "expanded and flattened out," as when one spreads out a piece of iron by hammer, it is said: *ṭuriqa al-ḥadīd*.

A problem with these two views is that they do not provide a clear connection between the first and second parts of the verse. Our explanation above should clarify this.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسْكَنَّاهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ ذَهَابٍ بِهِ لَقَادِرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

(23:18) ***And We send down water from the sky*** **(al-samāʾ)** ***according to a measure, then We cause it to settle in the earth, and most surely We are able to carry it away.***

What is meant by *al-samāʾ* (the sky, the heaven) here is "the above." Anything that is above you and overshadows you is called *samāʾ*. The water that is sent from the above is rain.

The phrase "*according to a measure*" indicates that what is sent from the above is sent according to God's perfect plan, which has a set measure for it. It shall neither exceed nor fall short of that plan by even a single drop. It also alludes to the verse: *And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure* (15:21).

The meaning is: "We send down water from your above according to a measure," referring to rain water. "Then We store it in the earth," referring to the groundwater that is held in the mountains and plains, which are sources of springs, rivers and wells. "And most surely We can take away this water"—which We have stored in the earth, in such a way that you would not know [where it has gone and how to reach it].

فَأَنْشَأْنَا لَكُمْ بِهِ جَنَّاتٍ مِنْ نَخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ لَكُمْ فِيهَا فَوَاكِهُ كَثِيرَةٌ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(23:19) ***Then We cause to grow*** **(fa-anshaʾnā, from inshāʾ)** ***thereby gardens of palm trees and grapes for you; you have in them many fruits and from them do you eat;***

The verb *inshāʾ*, when used for gardens, means "to make and grow gardens." The meaning of the verse is clear.

وَشَجَرَةً تَخْرُجُ مِنْ طُورِ سَيْنَاءَ تَنْبُتُ بِالدُّهْنِ وَصِبْغٍ لِلْآكِلِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(23:20) ***And a tree that grows out of Mount Sinai which produces oil and a condiment for those who eat.***

The conjunction "and" joins this verse to "gardens" in the previous verse. That is: "And We cause a tree to grow thereby out of Mount Sinai." This refers to the olive tree which grows abundantly in Mount Sinai.

…which produces oil…: That is, it bears a fruit that contains oil, referring to olive oil.

…and a condiment* (ṣibgh) *for those who eat: That is, it also produces a condiment for those who eat. *Ṣibgh* means "condiment and seasoning that is added to food." The verse specifically mentions the olive tree due to its peculiarity. The rest of verse should be clear.

وَإِنَّ لَكُمْ فِي الْأَنْعَامِ لَعِبْرَةً ۖ نُسْقِيكُمْ مِمَّا فِي بُطُونِهَا وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ كَثِيرَةٌ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(23:21) ***And most surely there is a lesson for you in the cattle: We make you to drink of what is in their bellies, and you have in them many advantages and of them you eat.***

The "lesson" that one should learn from the cattle is their indication that God directs the affairs of His creation and is most kind, compassionate and merciful toward them.

…We make you to drink of what is in their bellies…: That is, We provide you with their milk. In this verse, "many advantages" include various other benefits [besides drinking and eating] that people draw from the animals, such as their wool, hair, fur, skin and so on. It is then added: *And of them you eat.*

وَعَلَيْهَا وَعَلَى الْفُلْكِ تُحْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(23:22) ***And you are carried on them and on ships* (al-fulk).**

The pronoun "them" in the verse refers to the cattle. "Being carried on them" refers to riding camels. It refers to means of transportation on land, in contrast to travelling in the sea, which is "being carried on the ships." Therefore, this verse is equivalent in meaning to His words: *And We carry them in the land and the sea* (17:70). *Fulk* is the plural of *falakah*, meaning "ship" (*safīnah*).

Examining Narrations

(1) ʿAlī said: When the zygote (*nuṭfah)* completes four months [in the womb] an angel is sent to blow the spirit in it within the three layers of darkness. This is the meaning of His words: *then We caused it to grow into another creation* (23:14). That is, the spirit is blown in it.[1]

(2) Al-Ḥasan b. al-Jahm says: I heard Imam al-Riḍā saying: "Imam al-Bāqir said: The zygote (*nuṭfah)* remains in the womb for forty days, then it becomes a clot (*ʿalaqah)* for forty days, then it becomes a lump of flesh (*muḍghah)* for forty days. Then, once the four months are completed, God sends two creator angels [to it]. They will ask, "Our Lord! Should we create a male or female?" and they will be told what to do. Then they will ask, "Our Lord, wretched or felicitous?" and they will be told. They will ask, "Our Lord! What will be its lifespan, its sustenance and all of its other conditions?" Here the Imam [al-Riḍā] counted several items in like manner. Then he continued, "The covenant [of God with the children of Adam] will be written between its two eyes. When the duration [of pregnancy] is over, God will send an angel to it who will give it a single push. Thus it will come out while it has forgotten the covenant."
At this point al-Ḥasan b. al-Jahm asked, "So is it permissible to pray to God to change a girl to a boy or a boy to a girl?" The Imam [al-Riḍā] said: "Indeed God does whatever He wills."[2]

Author's comment: This hadith has been narrated from Imam al-Bāqir through other chains of transmission as well, with similar wording.

(3) Concerning "*And a tree that grows out of Mount Sinai* (ṭūri saynāʾ) *which produces oil and a condiment for those who eat*" (23:20) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: This is the olive tree and it is a parable for the Messenger of God and for the Commander of the Faithful [Imam ʿAlī]. *Ṭūr* means mountain and *saynāʾ* means tree.

(4) Concerning "*which produces oil and a condiment for those who eat*" (23:20) it is narrated from the Prophet: The olive tree is a blessed tree. Use it as condiment [for your food] and oil [for your skin].[3]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Faḍḍāl.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Verses 23-54

After listing His magnificent blessings upon the people, God continues with these verses by reminding them of His call to monotheism through His messengers. He briefly recounts the missions of His messengers from Noah to Jesus son of Mary. He does not name them explicitly except for Noah, Moses and Jesus. Noah is the first one who rose with the call to monotheism, and Moses and Jesus were among the last ones in the list. The names of the other messengers are not mentioned, but it is explicitly said that the call was continuous, and the messengers came one after another. However, the people's response was only to deny God's communications and to display ingratitude toward His blessings.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ ۖ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(23:23) ***And certainly We sent Noah to his people, and he said: O my people! Serve Allah, you have no god other than Him; will you not then guard [against evil]?***

As we said in the verses about the story of Noah in Sūrah Hūd [11:25-49], he was the first of the Resolute Messengers (*ūlū al-ʿazm*) who had books and laws, who were sent to all humankind, and who rose to establish monotheism and abolish polytheism publically. Thus, "his people" (*qawm*) in this verse means his nation (*ummah*), meaning all the people at his time.

…serve Allah, you have no god other than Him…: The idolaters used to worship other gods like the angels, the jinn and certain human saints, claiming that these are gods and should be worshiped instead of God. Noah urged them to serve God and abandon the worship of other gods besides Him.

Some exegetes have said:

"Serve God" means: "Serve Him *alone*," as it is explicitly narrated from him in Sūrah Hūd: *That you shall not serve any but Allah* (11:26). The qualification "alone" is not specified here to indicate that there is really no other form of *ʿibādah* (service, worship, obedience) other than serving God. In other words, serving God while associating other gods with Him is not regarded service at all.

This view neglects the fact that the idolaters did not use to worship God at all. They believed that worship is to direct one's attention to the object

of worship, while God is greater than being encompassed by the attention or knowledge of anyone. Thus, the solution is to seek nearness to some of His special creatures like the angels and others, so that they may intercede before Him and bring the worshipers nearer to Him. We should worship one who is in charge of our affairs, and God has entrusted the direction of our affairs to these beings. Hence, they are our gods, lords and objects of worship instead of Him.

Had they deemed it possible to worship God, they would have ruled that He alone should be worshiped because they had no doubt that He is the Lord of lords and the existentiator of all. Therefore, if it were correct to worship Him, then one should only worship Him, and it would not be permissible to worship other gods. The problem is that they did not deem it correct to worship God based on their presumption above.

Noah's order to his people that "*serve Allah*" is equivalent to: "Worship God alone," as mentioned in Sūrah Hūd: *That you shall not serve any but Allah* (11:26). Then, "*you have no god other than Him*" is equivalent to: You have no object of worship besides Him, for there are no lords other than Him that direct your affairs—so that you may worship them in hope of their mercy or in fear of their wrath.

…will you not then* (a-fa-lā) *guard [against evil]?: The word "then" (the letter *fāʾ*) shows that this is a conclusion which he drew from his previous statement. That is, given that you have no other lords who direct your affairs, will you not then guard yourselves against God's punishment for not worshipping Him and for not being grateful to Him?

فَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا هَٰذَا إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَتَفَضَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَنْزَلَ مَلَائِكَةً مَا سَمِعْنَا بِهَٰذَا فِي آبَائِنَا الْأَوَّلِينَ

(23:24) *And the chiefs* (al-malaʾ) *of those who disbelieved from among his people said: He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves who desires that he may have superiority over you, and if Allah had willed, He could certainly have sent down angels. We have not heard of this among our fathers of yore:*

Malaʾ means "the chiefs and elites among a people." "*Of those who disbelieved*" is a descriptive clause (*tawḍīḥī*), not a restrictive one (*iḥtirāzī*). In other words, no one among the chiefs of his people believed in him—based on what God has narrated from them elsewhere: *And we do not see any*

have followed you but those who are the meanest of us at first thought (11:27).

The context of the verse suggests that their audience in these two verses [23:24-25] was the general public. They wanted to entice the people to dismiss Noah's message, rise against him, cause trouble for him, and silence his call. The four or five points that God has narrated from them in these two verses are allegations that they concocted and sophistries that they presented as arguments in order to annul Noah's call.

…He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves who desires that he may have superiority over you…: This is their first argument, which breaks into two arguments when we analyze it. The gist of it is: Noah is just a human being like you. If he were truthful in his claim of revelation and connection to the unseen, then you should have had a similar connection as his, because you are not missing anything of humanity and its properties. Since such connection is not found in you, it means that he is a liar. After all, if it is within the capacity of humankind to reach some level of perfection, how could it be that no one reaches it except for a single individual, who then makes a claim to it without any evidence? The only remaining explanation for this is that he wants to have superiority over you and become your leader, which is confirmed by his call to obey and follow him.[1]

…and if Allah had willed, He could certainly have sent down angels…: This is their second argument. The gist of it is: If God wanted to make a call to us from the unseen, then He would have certainly chosen the angels for it, because they are the closest beings to Him and they are the intercessors that connect us to Him. It does not make sense to choose human beings for this because there is no connection between them and Him. Moreover, if angels descend and acknowledge that God should be worshiped alone, and that it is not permissible to worship them as gods and lords besides God, then that itself would be a clear sign showing the authenticity and truth of their call.

The verse uses the verb *inzāl* (to send down, to descend) instead of *irsāl* (to send, to dispatch) because the sending of angels occurs through their descent. Also, the use of "angels" in plural might refer to the many angels that they have assumed as gods.

…We have not heard of this among our fathers of yore: This is their third argument. The gist of it is: Had his message been a true call, then something similar to it should have happened in human history. Our fathers were better

1 Given the author's explanation, their first argument breaks into two sequential arguments: (1) He is lying in his claim to being connected to the unseen because "*He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves*." (2) He has forged this lie so "*that he may have superiority over you*." (Trans.)

and more intelligent than us, but nothing like this occurred to them and at their time. Hence, this is only an innovation and a fabricated lie.

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ فَتَرَبَّصُوا بِهِ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

(23:25) *He is only a man in whom is madness* (jinnah), *so bear with him for a time.*

This is their fourth argument. There are two possible meanings for *jinnah*: (1) it is a verbal noun, meaning *junūn* (madness); or (2) it is the singular form of *al-jinn* [assuming that *al-jinn* is plural], which would mean: one of the jinn has taken control of him and speaks through his tongue. The reason for this claim is that he is saying things that a sound mind cannot accept; he is saying things that only a demented person would say. Thus, wait and watch him for a while, until he either recovers from his insanity or dies; then we will be relieved from him.

These were different arguments that the chiefs of Noah's people told the public. It could also be that each argument was provided by a certain group of them against him. They benefited from these arguments despite their unsound dialectical nature. These arguments were effective in turning the people away from Noah, enticing them against him, and keeping them on the path of error.

قَالَ رَبِّ انْصُرْنِي بِمَا كَذَّبُونِ ﴿٢٦﴾

(23:26) *He said: O my Lord! Help me against their calling me a liar* (bimā kadhdhabūni).

This is Noah's request for help. The letter *bā'* in *bimā* indicates substitution (*badal*). That is: "Replace their denial by Your help." It could also indicate instrumentation (*ālah*). That is: "Help me by exactly the same part of my message that they deny," which would be his warning of punishment. This second meaning is based on what is narrated from them elsewhere in the Qur'an: *Bring to us what you threaten us with, if you are of the truthful ones* (11:32). It is also confirmed by Noah's supplication: *My Lord! Leave not upon the land any dweller from among the disbelievers* (71:26). This verse is not connected to the previous verse with a conjunction, indicating that it is an answer to an implied question.[1]

1 Given the previous allegations of the chiefs of his tribe against him, the implied question that one would naturally ask is, "What was Noah's reaction?" Then the current verse responds to that. (Trans.)

فَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ أَنِ اصْنَعِ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا وَفَارَ التَّنُّورُ
فَاسْلُكْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلٍّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَبَقَ عَلَيْهِ الْقَوْلُ
مِنْهُمْ ۖ وَلَا تُخَاطِبْنِي فِي الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ۖ إِنَّهُمْ مُغْرَقُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(23:27) ***So We revealed to him, saying: Make the ark before Our eyes and [according to] Our revelation; and when Our command is given and the oven gushes water, take into it of every kind a pair, two, and your family, except those among them against whom the word has gone forth, and do not speak to Me in respect of those who are unjust; surely they shall be drowned.***

The first word "so" (the letter *fā*ʾ) shows that this was a response to Noah's request for help. Making the ark "before God's eyes" means building it "while He sees." It is a way of saying "under God's watch and protection." Making it "according to His revelation" means that he was taught how to build the ark step by step by revelation from the unseen.

…and when Our command is given and the oven gushes water…: It has been said that "command" here refers to God's rule to settle the dispute between Noah and his people; that is, His decree of punishing them by drowning. The context suggests that the overflow of the oven by water was a sign that their punishment was imminent. Since the oven is a place of fire, its overflow with water was itself a miracle.

…take into it* (fa-usluk fīhā, from sulūk) *of every* (min kullin) *kind a pair, two…: The common recitation of the verse is *min kullin* (with *tanwīn*), which disconnects *kull* (every) from *zawjayn* (pair). This indicates an omission which is implied: "of every kind *of animal* take a pair." *Usluk fīhā* means "take them to the ship, make them enter it." Apparently the particle *min* (of, from) marks the starting point of the verb *usluk*.[1] The meaning is: Take into the ark of every kind of animal a pair of two, one male and one female.

…and your family* (ahlaka)*, except those among them against whom the word has gone forth…: The conjunction "and" joins "your family" with "a pair" (*zawjayn*). Some exegetes have said: Such conjunction would ruin the meaning, because it implies: "Take of every kind your family."[2] Instead, the meaning is: "and take (*usluk*) your family," which means that the verse

1 That is: "Start filling the ark with a pair of every kind of animal." (Trans.)

2 In other words, the qualification "of every kind" would also apply to "your family," which does not make sense. (Trans.)

involves another implied command of *usluk* (take) before "your family" which is omitted.

The above objection is not true because *min kullin* (of every) is in fact a qualification for *zayjayn* (pair), which means that it is really *subsequent* to it in terms of meaning, as we said above. Therefore if we take "your family" to be an addition to "pair," then "of every" would not be repeated there again.[1]

What is meant by *ahl* (family) in this verse is those who had a special connection with Noah, which apparently includes both members of his household and those who believed in him. The latter are mentioned separately in Sūrah Hūd [11:40] in addition to *ahl*, but this verse only says *ahl*.

…Except those among them against whom the word has gone forth…: What Noah understood from this was that it refers to his wife, who was an unbeliever. In reality, however, it also included his son, who preferred to take refuge in a mountain instead of getting on the ark, and thus he drowned.[2] The second part of the verse—"*the word has gone forth*"—refers to the final decree of drowning.

…and do not speak to Me in respect of those who are unjust; surely they shall be drowned: Forbidding Noah from saying anything to God about "*those who are unjust*" is meant to convey a severe prohibition against interceding for them. This prohibition is justified by: *surely they shall be drowned*. It is as if he is being told: I forbid you of even talking to Me about them, let alone interceding for them, for indeed My wrath is kindled against them in a way that nothing can avert it.

فَإِذَا اسْتَوَيْتَ أَنْتَ وَمَنْ مَعَكَ عَلَى الْفُلْكِ فَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي نَجَّانَا مِنَ
الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾ وَقُلْ رَبِّ أَنْزِلْنِي مُنْزَلًا مُبَارَكًا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْمُنْزِلِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(23:28-29) ***And when you are firmly seated, you and those with you, in the ark, say: All praise is due to Allah who delivered us from the unjust people. And say: O my Lord! Harbor me in a blessed harbor, and Thou art the best of harborers*** **(al-munzilīn).**

Here God teaches Noah to praise Him once he has settled in the ark, for

1 The author's point is that in terms of *wording*, "of every [kind]" is mentioned before "a pair," as the verse says: "Take of every [kind] a pair." However, in terms of *meaning*, what is meant is: "Take a pair of every [kind]." Thus, when "your family" is added to "pair" by the conjunction "and," it does not mean "and take of every kind your family," but it simply means "and take your family." (Trans.)

2 See verses 11:42-46 and 66:10. (Trans.)

saving him from the unjust folk. This is further evidence confirming that the "unjust people" shall inevitably drown. It also teaches Noah to ask God to rescue him from the flood, and to bring him down in a "blessed land," meaning a land that has abundant and persistent good. The justification for this prayer is that He is the best of descenders (*munzilīn*) [that is, He makes people to settle in the best possible manner].

The fact that God commands Noah to praise Him and describe His splendid qualities shows that Noah was one of His chosen and purified servants (*al-mukhlaṣīn*) because God is far above how others describe Him: *Glory be to Allah [for freedom] from what they describe; but not so the servants of Allah, the purified ones* (37:159-160).

In this story, God only mentions His decree of their definite drowning but does not report its actual occurrence. This suggests that they were obliterated in such a way that no report or account was left after them. It is also serves to show His immense power, His dreadful wrath, and their insignificance. Therefore, remaining silent about their death in these verses is more expressive in several ways, more so than what He says in the next story: *And We made them stories; so away with a people who do not believe!* (23:44).

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ وَإِن كُنَّا لَمُبْتَلِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(23:30) *Most surely there are signs in this, and most surely We are ever trying* (la-mubtalīn, from ibtilāʾ) *[humankind].*

This verse is addressed to the Prophet, saying that the abovementioned call [of Noah] and its following events were all a case of God's *ibtilāʾ*, meaning test and trial (*imtiḥān*, *ikhtibār*).

ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَا مِن بَعْدِهِمْ قَرْنًا آخَرِينَ ﴿٣١﴾ فَأَرْسَلْنَا فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ ۖ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(23:31-32) *Then We raised up after them another generation* (qarnan ākharīna). *So We sent among them a messenger from among them, saying: Serve Allah, you have no god other than Him; will you not then guard [against evil]?*

Qarn means people living in the same era.

… saying: Serve Allah…: This expression interprets and elaborates God's sending of messenger, where an act is interpreted by its result, as seen in His words: *The angels descend upon them, saying: Fear not, nor be grieved* (41:30).

وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِلِقَاءِ الْآخِرَةِ وَأَتْرَفْنَاهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا مَا هَٰذَا إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ يَأْكُلُ مِمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ مِنْهُ وَيَشْرَبُ مِمَّا تَشْرَبُونَ﴿٣٣﴾

(23:33) ***And the chiefs from among his people who disbelieved and denied the meeting of the hereafter, and whom We had given plenty to enjoy in this world's life, said: This is nothing but a mortal like yourselves, eating of what you eat from and drinking of what you drink.***

This verse is about the elite who were engrossed in the material world and attached to earthly life. They said this to arouse the public against their messenger.

God describes them with the following three qualities:

(1) They were disbelievers in God because they used to serve other gods.

(2) They denied the meeting of the hereafter, which means denial of *afterlife*, because it has been contrasted with "*this world's life*."

(3) Since they denied their origin and their end, they were cut from what is beyond this world. Thus they plunged into the material life.

Being endowed with abundance and luxury in life, they gravitated toward this world and indulged in its wealth, glamor and pleasures. As a result they followed their desires, irrespective of what is the truth and where is the reality. Hence they started speaking against the elements of religion—including monotheism, prophethood and resurrection—in different occasions. They argued against the message because they did not want to lose their material well-being and their freedom in pursuing their desires.

They pointed to their messenger with contempt and derision, and told the public: *This is nothing but a mortal like yourselves, eating of what you eat from and drinking of what you drink* (23:33). By doing so, they meant to call the messenger a liar in his claim of prophethood based on the same argument that we discussed in Noah's story above [under verse 23:24].

Moreover, to prove that the messenger is only a human being who is no different than other people, they referred to his eating and drinking, which are common in all animals. This reveals their values and mentality: that we have no human perfection to pursue beyond our animal nature; that all that matters is eating and drinking; that happiness consists of having the means to indulge more freely and abundantly in carnal pleasures. Thus God says about them: *They are as cattle* (7:179); *And those who disbelieve enjoy*

themselves and eat as the beasts eat (47:12). The next verses present some other arguments that they used to tell their people against their messenger.

وَلَئِنْ أَطَعْتُمْ بَشَرًا مِثْلَكُمْ إِنَّكُمْ إِذًا لَخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(23:34) ***And if you obey a mortal like yourselves, then most surely you will be losers:***

This is equivalent to what they said in the previous story: *who desires that he may have superiority over you* (23:24). What they meant was that this messenger is only a mortal like yourselves; he has no advantage over you. Therefore, if you obey and follow him, that would be a great loss for you and would cost you happiness in life, for the only life is the life of this world, and happiness only lies in freedom to indulge in the pleasures of this world. Obeying a person who has no advantage over you means consenting to be enslaved and ceasing to be free. That is a great loss.

أَيَعِدُكُمْ أَنَّكُمْ إِذَا مِتُّمْ وَكُنْتُمْ تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَنَّكُمْ مُخْرَجُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(23:35) ***What! Does he threaten you that when you are dead and become dust and bones that you shall then be brought forth?***

Being "brought forth" (*mukhrajūn*) means being resurrected (*mabʿūthūn*) from the graves for reckoning and retribution.

هَيْهَاتَ هَيْهَاتَ لِمَا تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(23:36) ***Far, far*** **(hayhāta hayhāta)** ***is that which you are threatened with.***

Hayhāt is an exclamation to show that something is unlikely. Its repetition emphasizes the improbability of being resurrected.

إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَبْعُوثِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(23:37) ***There is naught but our life in this world; we die and we live and we shall not be raised again.***

"*We die and we live*" means that some of us—human beings—die in this world and some others come to life and take their place, and so on this cycle continues. This sentence may also be interpreted as *tanāsukh* (transmigration, reincarnation), which is when the soul leaves the body upon death and settles in another body, either human or non-human. Transmigration was

a common belief among the polytheists and sometimes they referred to it as birth after birth [that is, rebirth]. However, this interpretation does not comply much with the context of these verses.

… and we shall not be raised again: That is, we shall not be raised back to life in another abode after this world.

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا وَمَا نَحْنُ لَهُ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(23:38) ***He is naught but a man who has forged a lie against Allah, and we are not going to believe in him.***

Having denied monotheism and the hereafter in the previous verses, here they deny prophethood, which consists of two things: (1) the messenger's claim of being a messenger; and (2) the content of his message.

There are two possibilities for the pronoun "we" in this verse: (1) It includes the chiefs and the general public. They included themselves with the public so that the people would not accuse them for stepping aside and only command the masses to reject the messenger. (2) It refers only to themselves [the chiefs], where they declare their stand so that the people would follow them.

The allegations and denials mentioned in these verses were all the result of a collection of qualities in them that God outlined at the beginning of this set of verses: denial of monotheism, prophethood and hereafter, as well as indulging in luxury and abundance in the worldly life.

Note that there is a subtle difference in the order of words between this story and the previous story [of Noah]. In this story, "from among his people" is mentioned *before* "who disbelieved": *And the chiefs from among his people who disbelieved and denied the meeting of the hereafter, and whom We had given plenty to enjoy in this world's life, said…* (23:33) but in the previous story it was mentioned *after* "who disbelieved": *And the chiefs of those who disbelieved from among his people said…* (23:24). The reason is that if it were to be mentioned after "who disbelieved" in this verse again, then that would disrupt the sequence of "*who disbelieved*," "*who denied*" and "*whom We had given plenty to enjoy*." And if it were to be mentioned after all of these descriptions, then there would be a long gap [between "who" and "from among his people"].

قَالَ رَبِّ انْصُرْنِي بِمَا كَذَّبُونِ ﴿٣٩﴾

(23:39) ***He said: O my Lord! Help me against their calling me a liar.***

The exposition of this verse was discussed in the previous story [under

verse 23:26].

قَالَ عَمَّا قَلِيلٍ لَيُصْبِحُنَّ نَادِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(23:40) *He said: In a little while* (ʿammā qalīl) *they will most certainly be* (la-yuṣbiḥunna) *regretful.*

This statement shows that the messenger's request was accepted and granted. Saying that they will be "regretful" alludes to the exterminating punishment that shall befall them. The particle *ʿammā* in fact consists of two particles *ʿan-mā*, where *ʿan* means "after," and *mā* emphasizes the shortness of the period. The plural pronoun "they" refers to the people (*qawm*) [mentioned in verse 23:33]. The verb *la-yuṣbiḥunna* is stressed in two ways: (1) the letter *lām* at the beginning, which indicates a vow or swear; and (2) the stressed letter *nūn* at the end which is used for emphasis. The meaning is: I swear that after a short while regret shall overtake them as punishment will befall them.

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الصَّيْحَةُ بِالْحَقِّ فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ غُثَاءً ۚ فَبُعْدًا لِلْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

(23:41) *So the Cry seized them in justice* (bil-ḥaqq)*, and We made them as rubbish* (ghuthāʾan)*; so away with the unjust people.*

The letter *bāʾ* in *bi-al-ḥaqq* (by truth, in justice) shows accompaniment (*muṣāḥabah*) and pertains to "seized them." That is: "The Cry seized them, such seizure that came with justice." The letter *bāʾ* could also show causality (*sababiyyah*), in which case *al-ḥaqq* (truth, justice) would be an adjective for an omitted noun. The implied meaning would be: "The Cry seized them because of a just cause or decree." This would be similar to the verse: *But when the command of Allah came, judgment was given with truth* (40:78).

Ghuthāʾ—sometimes recorded as *ghuththāʾ*—means "light materials that flow on a flood," like dry plants, leaves and brushwood.

…so away with the unjust people: This sentence means that they are cursed and far [from God's mercy]. It could also be a prayer against them.

The meaning is: Thus We fulfilled Our promise to Our messenger about their punishment: the heavenly Cry—that is, punishment—overtook them and made them like rubbish that floats on a flood. So may the wrongdoers be far away [from Our mercy].

The verses here do not name this tribe or their prophet. They came after Noah's tribe and they were then exterminated. It is likely that they were the tribe of Thamūd whose prophet was Ṣāliḥ. God says elsewhere in His Book that they came after Noah's tribe and were killed by a cry (*ṣayḥah*).

ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ قُرُونًا آخَرِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾ مَا تَسْبِقُ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلَهَا وَمَا يَسْتَأْخِرُونَ﴿٤٣﴾

(23:42-43) ***Then We raised after them other generations. No people can hasten on their doom nor can they postpone (it).***

We have already discussed the message of these two verses repeatedly.[1]

ثُمَّ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا تَتْرَىٰ ۖ كُلَّ مَا جَاءَ أُمَّةً رَسُولُهَا كَذَّبُوهُ ۚ فَأَتْبَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ بَعْضًا وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ ۚ فَبُعْدًا لِقَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(23:44) ***Then*** **(thumma)** ***We sent Our messengers one after another*** **(tatrā)*****; whenever there came to a people their messenger, they denied him, so We made some of them follow others and We made them stories; so away with a people who do not believe!***

The word *tatrā* is used when individuals come one after another, following each other. The word *tawātur* is from the same root and it means "a continuous sequence, with one member after another." It is narrated from al-Aṣmaʿī: "*Wātartu al-khabar* means: I reported the news piece by piece, with some pause between each two reports."

This verse complements a previous verse: *Then We raised after them other generations* (23:42). Here, the word "then" (*thumma*) marks the next part of the story that is recounted, but it does not indicate a temporal distance and separation between the two parts. The verse concisely refers to the stories of all the messengers and nations who came after the people of Noah and their subsequent people [mentioned above] until the time of Moses [mentioned below].

Here God is saying: After the abovementioned people who came after Noah's tribe and were exterminated by the Cry, We raised other nations and generations, and We dispatched Our messengers to them successively, one following another. However, whenever Our messenger came to any of these nations, they denied him.

… so We made some of them follow others…: That is, We made one nation follow the previous nation by exterminating them.

… and We made them stories…: That is, We transformed them from

1 For verse 23:42, see verses 6:6 and 23:31. For verse 23:43, see verses 7:34, 10:49, 15:5 and 16:61. (Trans.)

having real existence and life to existing only in stories and historical reports. This is the most eloquent expression to describe God's wrath which completely covers the enemies of the truth and the deniers of His call. It is such wrath that destroys their external existence, erases their vestige, and does not leave anything of them except a story.

… so away with a people who do not believe: That is, may the unbelieving folk be far [from Our mercy].

These verses show that it was God's *sunnah* (custom, tradition, conduct) to raise one generation after another, and send them His messengers one after another. This is God's custom of test and trial. The custom of the generations in return was to deny one messenger after another. Then God's second custom [in response to their custom of denial] was to requite and punish the community of deniers one after another.

ثُمَّ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ وَأَخَاهُ هَارُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا وَسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

(23:45) ***Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron, with Our signs and a clear authority.***

In this verse, Our "signs" (*āyāt*) refer to the staff, the white hand and the other miracles that Moses showed Pharaoh and his people. "Clear authority" means evident proof and argument. Some exegetes have incorrectly interpreted "authority" as the staff.

إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا وَكَانُوا قَوْمًا عَالِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(23:46) ***To Pharaoh and his chiefs, but they behaved haughtily and they were a domineering folk.***

According to some exegetes, the verse only names the chiefs of Pharaoh—but not the rest of his people—because the masses were followers of their chiefs and leaders.[1]

… and they were a domineering folk **(ʿālīn, from ʿuluww):** That is, their custom and practice was to seek supremacy and ascendancy over others and to enslave them, just as they did with the Children of Israel. *ʿUluww* (ascendancy, elevation) on earth is a metaphorical expression for oppressing the people and forcing them into obedience.

فَقَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ لِبَشَرَيْنِ مِثْلِنَا وَقَوْمُهُمَا لَنَا عَابِدُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَكَانُوا

1 Otherwise, Moses and Aaron were sent not only to Pharaoh and his chiefs, but also to the masses. (Trans.)

مِنَ الْمُهْلَكِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(23:47-48) ***And they said: What! Shall we believe in two mortals like ourselves while their people serve us? So they rejected them and became of those who were destroyed.***

Here, Pharaoh and his chiefs are implying two points: (1) Moses and Aaron have no advantage over us because they are mortals like ourselves. (2) We have advantage over them just as we have advantage over their people, because "*their people serve us*." Given that *we* are the superior ones over you, it is incumbent upon *you* to serve *us*, just as your people are serving us, not that we should subscribe to you!

This is seen elsewhere in the Qur'an, where Pharaoh says to Moses: *If you will take a god besides me, I will most certainly make you one of the imprisoned* (26:29). God then finishes their story at this point by mentioning their destruction: *So they rejected them and became of those who were destroyed* (23:48).

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(23:49) ***And certainly We gave Moses the Book that they may follow a right direction.***

The pronoun "they" refers to the Children of Israel, not Pharaoh and his chiefs, because they had already drowned when the Torah was revealed.

وَجَعَلْنَا ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَأُمَّهُ آيَةً وَآوَيْنَاهُمَا إِلَىٰ رَبْوَةٍ ذَاتِ قَرَارٍ وَمَعِينٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

(23:50) ***And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and We gave them a shelter*** **(āwaynāhumā, from īwāʾ)** ***on a highland*** **(rabwah)** ***that was secure and watered by a stream*** **(maʿīn).**

The "sign" was the extraordinary birth Jesus', as we have already discussed. Since he and his mother were parts of the same miracle, the verse refers to them as a sign (*āyah*) in singular form.[1]

Īwāʾ is derived from *awā*, which originally means "to return," but is used specifically when a person returns to his home and residence. *Āwāhu ilā* is used when someone is made to settle somewhere as a place of residence [as used in this verse]. *Rabwah* means "an elevated ground that is vast and

1 See verse 21:91, volume 28, pp. 111-112 of the English translation. (Trans.)

flat," and *maʿīn* means "running water."

The meaning is: We made Jesus son of Mary, together with his mother Mary, a sign that shows Our lordship. And We settled them in a vast, elevated and level place where they could rest and where they had running water.

يَا أَيُّهَا الرُّسُلُ كُلُوا مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا ۖ إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٥١﴾

(23:51) ***O messengers! Eat of the good things and do good; surely I know what you do.***

This verse is a general address to all messengers to eat of good things. What is meant by "eating" here is "to use and benefit from" in general, whether in the form of ingestion or in other ways. This is a common usage of the term.

The context of the verse shows that "*eat of the good things*" is meant as an expression of God's favor and grace upon the messengers. That is why they are then ordered to "*do good*," which means: Give thanks for My blessings by doing good.

… surely I know what you do: This ending justifies the previous command, warns them against disobeying His order, and arouses them to have *taqwā* (self-restraint, Godwariness, piety).[1]

وَإِنَّ هَٰذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ ﴿٥٢﴾

(23:52) ***And surely this your religion is one religion and I am your Lord, therefore be careful [of your duty] to Me.***

The exposition of this verse was discussed under a similar verse in Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ.[2]

فَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ زُبُرًا ۖ كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(23:53) ***But they fragmented*** **(fa-taqaṭṭaʿū)** ***their religion among themselves into sects*** **(zuburan)**, ***each party rejoicing in that which is with them.***

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *taqaṭṭuʿ* and *taqṭīʿ* mean the same (to cut off, to sever, to disconnect). *Zubur* is the plural of *zabūr*, which means

1 The call to *taqwā* is mentioned in the next verse: *Therefore be careful (of your duty) to Me* (23:52). (Trans.)

2 See verse 21:92, volume 28, pp. 118-120 of the English translation. (Trans.)

"book." The letter *fā*ʾ (then, so, therefore) at the beginning of the verse shows that what is mentioned is consequential to the previous discussion. The meaning is: God sent His messengers to the people, one after another, while they were all a single community having the same Lord. He instructed them to be wary and watchful of Him, but they did not comply with His command. Instead, they fragmented the matter of their religion between themselves into pieces and divided it into several books, where each party took up one, and each party was jubilant with what it had.

Ibn ʿĀmir's recitation reads *zubarān* (with *fatḥah* inflection on the letter *bā*ʾ). *Zubar* is the plural of *zubrah*, meaning *firqah* (division, sect, group). The meaning would be: "They divided their affair into sects and parties, where each sect was jubilant with what it had." This meaning is preferable to the first.[1]

فَذَرْهُمْ فِي غَمْرَتِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(23:54) *Therefore leave them in their overwhelming ignorance* (ghamratihim) *till a time* (ḥīn).

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Ghamrah* means abundant water which covers its bed. It is used symbolically for ignorance that covers the person.

This verse involves a threat of punishment. As we said earlier, it is God's custom to punish those who reject and deny His messengers. The word *ḥīn* is in the indefinite form (*nakirah*) which indicates that the promised punishment will come suddenly and unexpectedly.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam ʿAlī said: O people, surely God has assured you that He will not *wrong* you, but He has not guaranteed you that He will not *test* you. Rather, He says: *Most surely there are signs in this, and most surely We are ever trying [humankind]* (23:30).[2]

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1 The translation is based on this preferred meaning, which is found in most English translations. Also, the word *ummah* in verse 23:52 originally means "nation" or "community" but it is better translated as "religion" as per the context. That is why *amr* (lit. "affair, matter") in verse 23:53 means "religious affair" and corresponds to "religion" in the previous verse. An alternative translation, based on the author's first interpretation, would be: *But they cut off their affair into books*… (Trans.)

2 *Nahj al-balāghah*.

(2) Concerning "*and We made them as rubbish* (ghuthāʾan)" (23:41) Imam al-Bāqir said: *Ghuthāʾ* means the dry and withered plants of earth.[1]

(3) Concerning "*on a highland* (rabwah) *that was secure and watered by a stream* (dhāti qarār wa maʿīn)" (23:50) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Rabwah* is Ḥīrah [a city near Kūfah], and "the place that was secure and watered by a stream" is Kūfah.

(4) It is also narrated about the same verse [23:50] that Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq interpreted the word *rabwah* as Ḥīrah and the suburbs of Kūfah; *qarār* as the Mosque of Kūfah; and *maʿīn* as Euphrates.[2]

(5) The Prophet said: "*Rabwah* is Damascus in Syria."[3] In another narration he said: "It [*rabwah*] is Ramallah."[4]

Author's comment: All of these narrations are weak.

(6) Concerning "*O messengers! Eat of the good things*" (23:51) the Prophet said: Surely God is good and He does not accept except what is good. He has ordered the believers to what He has ordered the messengers, for He says: *O messengers! Eat of the good things* (23:51), and He also says: *O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided you with* (2:172).[5]

Author's comment: This hadith is also narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and others, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

(7) Concerning "*one ummah*" (23:52) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means that you all belong to the same religion.

(8) Concerning "*each party rejoicing in that which is with them*" (23:53) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: Anyone who chooses a religion for himself rejoices with it.

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAsākir, on the authority of Abū Umāmah.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAsākir and others, on the authority of Murrat al-Bahzī.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

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Verses 55-77

These verses build on what was said above: *Therefore leave them in their overwhelming ignorance till a time* (23:54). Following the story of the prophets, it was said that people have subsequently disagreed with each other in religion and have divided into sects, and that each party is pleased with its way [23:53]. Then they were warned by a punishment that has its appointed time, of which they shall have no escape or delivery. Thus let them wander in their ignorance as they wish, for soon punishment will overtake them undoubtedly [23:54].

These verses warn them about a mistake and misconception: they should not suppose that when God aids them with wealth and children, He is favoring them by a fast track to good. If that were the case, then their affluent ones would not have been taken by punishment. Rather, the real hastening to good is when God aids the believers to do righteous deeds, because this makes them qualify to receive abundant payoff and magnificent reward in this world and the next. The believers hasten toward good things [that is, good deeds] and God hastens to them by good things [that is, good reward].

God's argument is complete against the disbelievers, and His punishment is bound to overtake them. They have no excuse to exonerate themselves, for any excuse that they may possibly bring is false. They cannot excuse themselves by any of the following claims:

(1) that they did not understand the speech [that is, the Qur'an];

(2) that the Prophet's call was an innovation without any predecessor;

(3) that they did not know God's Messenger [from before];

(4) that the Messenger was insane and speaker of nonsense;

(5) that the Messenger asked them for some recompense.

Rather, the problem is that *they* are insistent and obstinate in their enmity. That is why they will not believe until their irrevocable doom comes to them.

أَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّمَا نُمِدُّهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾ نُسَارِعُ لَهُمْ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ ۚ بَلْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(23:55-56) ***Do they think that by what We aid them*** **(numidduhum)** ***with of wealth and children, We are hastening to them of good things? Nay, they do not perceive.***

Numidduhum is derived from *imdād* (to help, aid, assist, extend). *Madd* and *imdād* are synonymous, meaning "perfecting the deficiency of something and preserving it from loss and discontinuation." According to al-Rāghib, *imdād* is usually used for things that are pleasant, while *madd* is usually used for things that are unpleasant. *Numidduhum* in this verse would correspond to *imdād*, as it is used for something unpleasant.

… hastening to them of good things…: They suppose that good things are the wealth and children that God provides for them rapidly and successively, due to their high position and worth in His sight.

The meaning is: Do they think that the wealth and children that We give them during this period of respite [in this world] are good things that We hasten toward them because We are pleased with them, are happy with their acts, and hold them in high regard and honor?

… Nay, they do not perceive: The reality is contrary to what they think. The disbelievers are ignorant of the fact of the matter—that Our provision for them is a matter of giving them respite and leading them step-by-step [into temptation] (*istidrāj*). We are only "aiding them to blindly wander in their transgression" [2:15]. He says: *We draw them near [to destruction] by degrees from whence they know not. And I grant them respite; surely My scheme is effective* (7:182-183).

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ هُمْ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ رَبِّهِمْ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(23:57) ***Surely they who from fear of their Lord are cautious,***

In these five verses [23:57-61], God builds on the previous verses in order to explain the mistake of the disbelievers in thinking that wealth and children are good things that are hastened toward them. These are by no means good things, but they are a way of giving them respite and leading step-by-step [into temptation] (*istidrāj*). Good things are rather what the believers—those who believe in God, His messengers and the Final Day and those who are righteous in their acts—hasten toward. He describes them in these verses.

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Ishfāq* is a mixture of two feelings: caring (*ʿināyah*) and fear (*khawf*). If one is *mushfiq* about something, it means that: (1) he holds it dear; and (2) he is worried about [evil] things that may reach it. He says: "…*and they are fearful* (mushfiqūn) *of the hour*" (21:49). If the object of *ishfāq* is preceded with the particle *min* (lit. "of"), then its sense of fear is more highlighted. If the object of *ishfāq*

is preceded with the particle *fī* (lit. "in"), then its sense of caring is more vivid. He says: *Surely we feared before on account of our families* (fī ahlinā mushfiqīn) (52:26); *those who believe are in fear from it* (mushfiqīn minhā) (42:18).

Referring to God as "their Lord" shows that they have accepted God as the One Who directs their affairs. Hence, they see their salvation and damnation as a function of His satisfaction and wrath. That is why they fear Him with respect to a matter that they love, which is their salvation and felicity. Their concern, fear and regard for their Lord lead them to believe in His communications and serve Him. Based on this interpretation, saying fear (*khashyah*) and caution (*ishfāq*) in this verse is not repetitive.[1]

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(23:58) ***And those who believe in the communications*** **(bi-āyāt)** ***of their Lord,***

What is meant by *āyāt* (signs, communications) in this verse is anything that somehow signifies God and points toward Him. This includes His messengers who carry His message, the scriptures and other signs by which they were supported, and the divine laws that they brought. Being cautious out of fear of God arouses them to seek His satisfaction, accept His call, and abide by His orders which they have received through His revelations and messengers.

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ لَا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(23:59) ***And those who do not associate [aught] with their Lord.***

This verse connects to the last verse in two ways: (1) Part of God's communications [mentioned in the last verse] is His legal code (shariah), which commands them to serve God [alone]. (2) Part of God's communications is arguments that prove His Oneness in lordship and worship. That is why their belief in God's communications prevents the believers from associating others with Him in worship.

Moreover, a necessary implication of lordship is that a lord must dispatch messengers that would guide his subjects to the right path, so that they may achieve salvation. Hence, had there been a partner for God, that partner should have also sent messengers. However, we have not received

1 They are not repetitive because the two terms together convey that their fear is with respect to something that they love and care about: their felicity. (Trans.)

any messengers or prophets from other gods. One of the fine speeches of Imam ʿAlī is: "If your Lord had a partner, then surely his messengers would have come to you."[1]

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْتُونَ مَا آتَوْا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ وَجِلَةٌ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ رَاجِعُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(23:60) ***And those who give what they give [in alms] while their hearts are full of fear*** **(wajilah, from wajal)** ***that to their Lord they must return.***

Wajal means "fear" (*khawf*).

… who give what they give…: This refers to making donations in God's way. Some have suggested that it includes any righteous act.

… while their hearts are full of fear…: This qualification describes their state and condition as they "*give what they give*."

The meaning is: And those who spend in charity—or do righteous deeds—in a state that their hearts are full of fear because they shall soon return to their Lord. What motivates them to make donations—or to do righteous deeds—is their remembrance, coupled with fear, of their inevitable return to their Lord.

This verse implies their belief in the Last Day and their performance of righteous deeds. Thus the attributes of the believers are completed: (1) they believe in God alone without associating any partners with Him; (2) they believe in His messengers; (3) they believe in the Last Day; and (4) they perform righteous deeds.

أُولَٰئِكَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَهُمْ لَهَا سَابِقُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(23:61) ***These [are they who] hasten to good things and they are foremost*** **(sābiqūn, from sibāq)** ***in [attaining] them*** **(lahā).**

Apparently the letter *lām* (for) in *lahā* (for it, toward it) means *ilā* (to, toward) in this verse. Therefore, *lahā* indicates the end and goal of their race (*sibāq*). The meaning is: Those whom We described [above] are the ones who hasten to good things—that is, righteous acts—and they are foremost toward them. In other words, they compete with each other in doing righteous acts. Each of them wants to be the first to achieve goodness.[2]

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1 *Nahj al-balāghah*, Letter 31. (Trans.)

2 *Sābiqūn* can also mean "winners in the race." The meaning, as translated by Pickthall, would be: "They shall win them in the race." Here, the pronoun "them" (*hā* in *lahā*) refers to "good things" and the letter *lām* retains its primary meaning

Thus these verses clarify that what is meant by "good things" [23:56] are righteous deeds which are based on true belief. That is what the believers have or compete to have, which is contrary to what the disbelievers think: that what God is giving them is a sign that He is hastening them to good things.

In *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* [al-Rāzī] says:

> There are two possibilities for the meaning of "*These [are they who] hasten to good things*":
>
> (1) They show intense zeal and interest in acts of obedience. They rush toward these acts before their time expires, and before they miss the chance empty-handed.
>
> (2) They hasten toward a variety of benefits and honors in this world, as He says: *So Allah gave them the reward of this world and better reward of the hereafter* (3:148); *and We gave him his reward in this world, and in the hereafter he will most surely be among the righteous ones* (29:27). [The act is attributed to them because] when worldly benefits are hastened toward them, it is equivalent to them hastening toward the benefits and rushing to attain them. This interpretation better matches the previous verses [than the first interpretation] because it affirms for the believers what was negated about the disbelievers [in verses 23:55-56].

Author's comment: Whereas the previous verses negated God's hastening of good for the disbelievers, this verse affirms the hastening of the believers in good. The above explanation [by al-Rāzī] shows that their hastening in good is, in a way, equivalent to God's hastening,[1] but he should still explain why the verse [23:61] mentions their hastening in good instead of God's hastening [as in verse 23:56]. Some exegetes have said that this switch of subjects is meant to show that they *fully deserve* to attain good things by the virtue of their good deeds. However, this is clearly an implausible explanation.

Apparently what needs explanation is not the current verse [23:61], because its subject is how it should naturally be. Instead, we should explain the reversal of subject in the previous verse: *We are hastening to them of*

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of "for." This interpretation is more apparent and less repetitive, because the verse first talks about their hastening to good things, and then confirms that they shall indeed win and acquire these good things. (Trans.)

1 That is, their hastening to do good deeds is equivalent to God hastening to bring good rewards and results to them. (Trans.)

good things? (23:56). The overall message of that verse is: "They wrongly suppose that the wealth and children which We have provided for them are good things that have been hastened toward them due to their worth and merit, despite their disbelief." However, the verse attributes this act of "hastening" to God because they are given these bounties through God's bestowment, not through their own effort and acquisition. The rhetorical question there [in verse 23:56] negates their supposition, then its opposite is affirmed for the believer in the current verse [23:61], with the subject being how it natural should be.

The negation and affirmation in these verses effectively convey the following points: (1) Wealth and children are not good things to be hastened toward. (2) The disbelievers do not hasten toward good things [because of their disbelief and misdeeds]. (3) What is good is righteous deeds and their good rewards, and it is the believers who hasten toward that good.

وَلَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۖ وَلَدَيْنَا كِتَابٌ يَنْطِقُ بِالْحَقِّ ۚ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

(23:62) ***And We do not lay on any soul a burden except to the extent of its ability, and with Us is a book which speaks the truth, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.***

Given the context of these verses, this verse encourages and urges the readers to adopt the abovementioned qualities of the believers. It also negates two potential illusions that could prevent the people from striving for such honor:

(1) Acquiring these qualities is an easy task which is in the capacity of all people. It is not as difficult and toilsome as the indolent and extravagant people pretend and presume.

(2) God does not waste the righteous deeds of the believers, and will not forget their abundant reward.

And We do not lay on any soul a burden except to the extent of its ability…: This sentence states that there are no difficult obligations in religion that are beyond the people's capacities. In terms of belief, God has established proofs and clear signs which lead us to the true teachings that He wants us to believe in. He has equipped humankind with a tool which helps them understand and confirm these realities, and that is the intellect. He has further taken into account that intellects vary in terms of their power of intellection. That is why what He expects from each person is in accordance to one's capacity and ability. He does not require from the

general public what He requires from the elite; He will not hold the average good-doers (*al-abrār*) accountable for what He will ask the near-most ones (*al-muqarrabūn*); He does not charge the disadvantaged ones with what He charges the chosen ones.

Similarly, in terms of practice, His religious call secures two objectives for humankind: (1) their good in their individual and social lives in this world; and (2) their eternal felicity in the hereafter. It is also clear that the good of any species, including the human being, lies in what benefits its life and completes its existence. All beings are equipped with what enables them to move toward and achieve their good. Therefore, there is no difficult burden beyond one's ability and capacity. There is no undue obligation in God's religion, meaning a difficult legislated duty that would serve an undue objective. God expresses this as a favor of His upon His servants [in this verse]. By saying this, God comforts their souls and persuades them to acquire the abovementioned qualities of believers.

And We do not lay on any soul* (nafsan) *a burden except to the extent of its ability…: There is more depth to this verse than the above points. It negates two types of difficulty:

(1) a duty that is undue to begin with, such as the legislation of monasticism (*rahbāniyyah*) or sacrificing one's child as offering;

(2) a duty that is not difficult per se, but some of its instances would be difficult due to particular conditions of an individual, such as standing up in prayer for a sick person who cannot stand.

Both impositions are negated in this verse, although the first point would suffice to show God's favor and encouragement that we mentioned above. The negation of the second kind of obligation is deduced from the word *nafsan* (any soul) in the indefinite form (*nakirah*), and in a context of negation. Such usage shows universality. That is: *Any* soul that is conceived in *any* situation is not charged except to the extent of its ability. It will not be imposed by an undue duty—whether the duty is undue in and of itself, or it is undue in the person's particular circumstances.

Given the above discussion, the following two points can be deduced from the verse: (1) There are different of degrees and levels of belief, according to the degrees of intellects. (2) There are no undue obligations, whether because of the nature of the act, or because of circumstantial considerations.

…and with Us is a book which speaks the truth, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly: This sentence encourages the people by assuring them that their actions will not be wasted, and their promised rewards will not be defaulted.

… a book which speaks…: That is, it reveals its content without any

delusion, because their very actions are recorded in the book, and because it only speaks the truth. Thus, the book's speech is free from any addition, omission or distortion of truth. The word "speaks" shows that their reckoning will be based on what is recorded in the book. This reckoning will in turn be a basis for their reward. That is why the verse says: *and they shall not be dealt with unjustly*. Therefore, the people are assured that they will not be wronged in any way, such as their reward being forgotten, not being given to them, being reduced, or being altered. They should also rest assured that their actions will be recorded, and the records will neither be lost nor altered in any way whatsoever.

Al-Rāzī says in *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*:

> One might raise the following objection: Those whose actions are recorded would believe in either of the following: (1) it is impossible for God to lie; or (2) it is possible for Him to lie. If they believe in its impossibility, then they would accept anything that He says, whether it is in a book or not. If they believe in its possibility, then they would not trust the book either, because they deem it possible that God may have recorded their book falsely. Either way, there is no point in the book of deeds.
>
> Our answer to this objection is: "God does whatever He wills" [14:27]. Moreover, there might be some benefit in this for the angels that are charged [with the recording of actions in books].

Author's comment: Al-Rāzī's answer is based on his school of thought, which denies real objectives in God's actions, and deems it possible for Him to have an arbitrary and purposeless will. However, God is exalted and free from such will. In addition, the above objection would equally apply to the other stages of the Day of Resurrection, which we find in God's Book, such as the mustering and gathering the people, bringing witnesses to testify, opening the books and records of deeds, extending the bridge, setting up the scales, and reckoning the deeds.

The explanation for all of these events is that God has used the analogy of a court of justice in order to depict for us the different stages that humankind will face on the Day of Resurrection. Judgment qua judgment necessarily depends on evidence and proof, such as records, witnesses, signs, and confrontation of the opposite parties. Otherwise, it will not be a proper judgment. Yet, it should be noted that irrespective of this analogy and comparison [of the Day of Resurrection to a court of justice], one's actions will appear and manifest to him in the stages of his return to God

only by God's will and permission. The reader should reflect on this.[1]

بَلْ قُلُوبُهُمْ فِي غَمْرَةٍ مِنْ هَٰذَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْمَالٌ مِنْ دُونِ ذَٰلِكَ هُمْ لَهَا عَامِلُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(23:63) *Nay, their hearts are in overwhelming ignorance* (ghamrah) *with respect to this* (hādhā) *and they have besides this other deeds which they do.*

Ghamrah means intense heedlessness or ignorance that covers someone. There are two possibilities for the demonstrative pronoun "this" (*hādhā*): (1) It refers to the abovementioned qualities of the believers and their hastening toward good. This is the most plausible interpretation given the theme of the verses. (2) It refers to the Qur'an, as indicated by what is said below: *My communications were indeed recited to you* (23:66).

…and they have besides this other deeds which they do: That is, the disbelievers have deeds that are different from what We said about the believers. They are engrossed in other acts which prevent them from pursuing the good things and righteous acts that were mentioned above. "*Other deeds which they do*" refer to their evil actions and vices.

The meaning is: The disbelievers are rather immersed in intense heedlessness or ignorance about the qualities of believers that We described. Instead they have evil actions and vices that they commit, by which they are kept busy and prevented [from the righteous acts of the believers].

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَخَذْنَا مُتْرَفِيهِمْ بِالْعَذَابِ إِذَا هُمْ يَجْأَرُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(23:64) *Until when We overtake their affluent ones with punishment, lo! They cry [for help]* (yajʾarūna, from juʾār).

Juʾār is "the sound of wild animals when they are scared," such as the sound of the antelope and other similar animals. In this verse it is used metaphorically, referring to their loud cry and appeal for help. Some exegetes have suggested that it refers to their wail and moan out of pain. The following verses favor the first meaning.[2]

The verse specifically mentions "their affluent ones" as being taken

1 A brief hint: God is never subject to a system that is created or legislated by Himself. *God does whatever He will* (14:27). (Trans.)

2 The difference is that the first meaning involves an aspect of asking for help, while the second meaning only involves an expression of pain. (Trans.)

by punishment because it is a continuation of what was said above: "*Do they think that by what We aid them with of wealth and children…*" (23:55), which was about their chiefs who are well-off. The rest of the people are their followers.[1]

لَا تَجْأَرُوا الْيَوْمَ ۖ إِنَّكُمْ مِنَّا لَا تُنْصَرُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

(23:65) ***Cry not [for help] this day; surely you shall not be given help from Us.***

There is a switch of address in this verse, from the third person to the second person. This emphasizes the rebuke and censure of the disbelievers. It completely severs their hope in being saved due to crying for help—or any other hope or wish that they may have. If they were still mentioned in the third person, it would mean that they will be told *indirectly*—by God's intermediaries and agents—that they will not be helped through supplication or intercession. Such address would not have severed their hopes of being helped as firmly as being told *directly* by One from Whom comes the help.

قَدْ كَانَتْ آيَاتِي تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ تَنْكِصُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾
مُسْتَكْبِرِينَ بِهِ سَامِرًا تَهْجُرُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(23:66-67) ***My communications were indeed recited to you, but you used to turn back*** **(tankiṣūna, from nukūṣ)** ***on your heels. In arrogance; talking nonsense*** **(tahjurūna, from hujr)** ***about it*** **(bihi),** ***in your nightly sessions*** **(sāmiran)**.

Nukūṣ means "to turn back." *Sāmir* is derived from *samar*, which means "to speak at night." It is said that *sāmir* (one who speaks by night) is used for both singular and plural, like *ḥāḍir* (one who is present). The word has also been recited as *summaran* (plural of *sāmir*), which is preferred. Another recitation is *summāran* (also plural of *sāmir*, in exaggerated form). *Hujr* (also recorded as *hajr*) means "to speak nonsense" [as in a state of sickness, hallucination or dream].

My communications were…: This verse is not joined to the previous verse by a conjunction [such as "and" (*wāw*) or "so" (*fā'*)]. This kind of disjointed beginning indicates that the verse is an explanation and justification of what was said above.

The meaning is: You will not be helped by Us because when Our

1 Thus the verse applies to them all. (Trans.)

communications were read and recited to you, you would disregard them, would turn back on your heels in arrogance, and would sit together at nights to babble and speak nonsense about this matter.

Some have said that the pronoun "it" in "about it" (*bihi*) refers to the House (that is, the Kaʿbah) or the haram [of Mecca]. However, this is unlikely.

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أَفَلَمْ يَدَّبَّرُوا الْقَوْلَ أَمْ جَاءَهُمْ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِ آبَاءَهُمُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(23:68) ***Is it then that they do not ponder over the speech, or is it that there has come to them that which did not come to their fathers of old?***

This verse marks the beginning of a series of verses which refute the excuses of the disbelievers for turning away from the Qu'ran's guidance and rejecting the Prophet's call to the truth.

Is it then that they do not* (a-fa-lam) *ponder over the speech* (al-qawl)…*?: This is a rhetorical question that implies a negation. "The speech" (*al-qawl*) is in the definite form, referring to the Qur'an which was read to them. The use of "then" (the letter *fāʾ*) at the beginning of the verse shows that what is said here builds on what was said before about their heedlessness of the Qur'an and their engagement in things that keep them busy from it. The means is: In that state of engagement, why did they not ponder over this speech that is recited to them so that they would realize that it is a true speech from God? If they had done so, they would have believed in it.

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…or is it that there has come to them that which did not come to their fathers of old?: In this verse and in the following verses, "or" (the particle *am* in Arabic) does not serve as a conjunction, but it marks a transition to another point. It is equivalent to "nay" or "rather." The meaning is: Rather, has something come to them which did not come to their forefathers, making it an innovation that should be rejected and avoided?

Not everything that is new, innovated and unknown to the previous generations is necessarily false and invalid. However, the purpose of religion is to guide the people, and God's guidance equally applies to all people at all times. If a religion is truly from God, then it should have an equivalent across the history of humankind. If something was not sent to the previous generations, then it cannot be part of God's guidance for all humankind. That would be a decisive proof for its falsehood.

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أَمْ لَمْ يَعْرِفُوا رَسُولَهُمْ فَهُمْ لَهُ مُنْكِرُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(23:69) ***Or is it that they have not recognized their Messenger, so that they deny him?***

"Recognizing the messenger" means knowing his identity and lineage, as well as an overall familiarity with his inherited and acquired moral characters and psychological traits. Knowing these, it would be clear to the people that he is truthful in what he says, believes in his call, and is supported by God. They knew the Prophet's condition before his mission: he was an orphan who had lost both of his parents, did not read or write, and was not educated or trained by any teacher or instructor. Yet, they never saw anything in him that is reprehensible, repulsive or evil to human nature, reason, or sound judgment. They did not find in him any desire for kingdom, any greed for wealth, or any love for power. He passed several years of his life in this way, until he suddenly came to them reciting a book, inviting them to salvation and felicity, propagating teachings and commandments that mesmerize the intellects, and presenting a religion that amaze the minds.

Therefore they knew their Messenger by his specific miraculous qualities. Had they not known him as such, it would have been a valid excuse for them to turn away from his religion and refuse to believe in him. Not knowing him as such means knowing him to lack some of these qualities or possess the opposite of them. Clearly submitting to a person like that would be against the rule of reason.

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ بِهِۦ جِنَّةٌۢ ۚ بَلْ جَآءَهُم بِٱلْحَقِّ وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ لِلْحَقِّ كَٰرِهُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(23:70) ***Or do they say: There is madness in him? Nay! He has brought them the truth, and most of them are averse from the truth.***

This refers to another excuse of theirs, as they said: *O you to whom the Reminder has been revealed! you are most surely a madman* (15:6). Instead of directly negating their accusation of madness, the verse states an implication or equivalent of its negation: *Nay! He has brought them the truth*. This means that the second part of the verse—"*Nay! He has brought them the truth, and most of them are averse from the truth*"—is a transition from an omitted sentence. The implied meaning is: They lie in their claim that "*There is madness in him*," making that an excuse to not believe in him. Rather, they were disinclined to believe in him because he has brought them the truth, while most of them are averse to the truth.

This transition alludes, by implication, to an argument that refutes their claim. The argument is as follows: If their claim that "*There is madness in him*" were true, then the Prophet's speech should have been confused,

without a sensible meaning, and out of order—just like his intellect. The speech of a madman misses the correct meaning. However, his speech is not like that, because his message is entirely true and he calls only to the truth. What similarity is there between his speech and the speech of a madman who does not know what he wants and does not realize what he says?!

Aversion to the truth is attributed to "most of them" because amongst them, there were some disadvantaged individuals (*mustaḍʿafīn*) who were not significant [in the society], and whose aversion or attraction to the truth did not matter [in the sight of the majority].

وَلَوِ اتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ ۚ بَلْ أَتَيْنَاهُمْ بِذِكْرِهِمْ فَهُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِهِمْ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

(23:71) ***And should the truth follow their low desires, surely the heavens and the earth and all those who are therein would have perished. Nay! We have brought to them their reminder, then from their reminder they turn aside.***

The last verse said: (1) they are averse to the truth; and (2) their aversion is because the truth goes against their desires. This means that they want the truth—meaning the message or mission that calls to the truth—to follow their desires.

However, this will certainly never happen, because of the following argument: Suppose that the truth were to follow their desires, meaning that they would be left to believe and act as they wish. Then, they would worship idols, subscribe to multiple lords, reject the divine message, and deny the hereafter. They would commit any indecency, iniquity and mischief that they wanted. Now, if the truth could follow their desires in these matters [of legislation and divine law], then it should also be possible that the truth follows their desires in other matters, such as the creation of the beings and the system that governs the universe. After all, there is no difference between "the truth" and "the truth."[1] Then each of them should be granted what he wishes about the order of the universe. However, that would guarantee the collapse and corruption of the heavens, the earth and everything therein. It would cause disorder in the system and would eradicate the universal laws that govern the universe, because clearly desires change all the time and do

1 That is, these are different forms and aspects of the same truth (as a general concept and universal reality). The truth is one, although it may take different forms and applications according to context. (Trans.)

not stop at any boundary.

This discussion can be expressed in a subtler way that is more compatible with the reality of religion according to the Qur'an: The human being is an existential reality that is connected in its existence with the entire world of creation. It is a part of the web of existence. As a species, it has a purpose that marks its perfection, and it has a path that leads it to its perfection and felicity—just like the other species. The way the universe is created in general, and the way the human being is created in particular, have provided this species with certain faculties and means that match its path to perfection and are compatible with its growth. The path of this species to its eternal happiness consists of the right beliefs and actions.

In other words, there is a path that leads humankind to their felicity and connects to their eternal happiness; a path of belief and action. This path is according to: (1) the general system of creation of the entire universe; and (2) the particular creation of humankind, which is called *fiṭrah* (primary nature, innate disposition). This path is called religion (*dīn*), and it is founded on these two existential realities. God refers to this idea where He says: *Then set your face upright for religion in the right state—the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion* (30:30).

Based on the above, the lifestyle that leads one to human perfection is a particular path that is a direct consequence of *al-ḥaqq* (the truth, the reality). It is defined and identified by "the truth," which is twofold in this case, consisting of: (1) the system that governs the universe in reality; and (2) the makeup of the human being.[1] This truth consists of certain fixed and unchanging laws that govern the world of creation, a part of which is humankind and their course of perfection. This truth is what directs the affairs of the universe and leads every species toward its perfection. This is what God has decreed and set in place, and His decree is decisive and definite.

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1 As the author said above and repeats below, the second aspect of truth is actually a part and subset of the first. It is mentioned separately because of its particular importance and application in the path of "truth" to human perfection. Overall, the author's point is that "truth" in the realm of religion must match "truth" in the realm of creation. The "true" path to human perfection is that which corresponds to the "true" order of events in the universe in general, and to the creation of humankind in particular. Legislative truth, which consists of a set of beliefs and practices, is inseparable from external and existential truth. That is why religious beliefs and legal codes cannot be based on wavering personal opinions and whimsical desires. (Trans.)

Now, if the truth were to follow the desires of the disbelievers and legislate any vain and baseless law that they wish, that would necessitate a change in the entire system and creation of the universe. The causal connections and the ordered links between different events and entities would have to change to a vain and baseless set of links that are incompatible and disagree with one another, only to match their whimsical and baseless desires. That would cause corruption in the initial setup, as well as the following direction, of the entire world of creation, including the heavens, the earth, and everything within them. The fact is that creation and direction are mixed together and inseparable from one another. That is why the system of existence and the legal codes are intertwined; one cannot be severed from another. This is what is meant by His words: *And should the truth follow their low desires, surely the heavens and the earth and all those who are therein would have perished* (23:71).

…Nay! We have brought to them their reminder, then from their reminder* (dhikrihim) *they turn aside: What is meant by "reminder" (*dhikr*) is the Qur'an, as He says: *And this is a blessed reminder* (21:50), *And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people* (43:44), and other verses. The last verse said, "*Or do they say: There is madness in him*" (23:70), and this verse refers to the Qur'an as "reminder." These two together would counter a claim that is narrated from the polytheists elsewhere: *O you to whom the Reminder has been revealed! You are most surely a madman* (15:6).

The Qur'an is called a "reminder" because: (1) it reminds the people of God; or (2) it reminds them true beliefs and righteous deeds. The second meaning is more compatible with the first part of the verse as we interpreted it above. Even though all divine religions throughout history call to the truth, they vary in terms of brevity and elaboration. That is why the Qur'an is specifically described as "their" reminder [being attributed to the audience at the time of the Prophet]. The Qur'an is a reminder of the true path in its most detailed and elaborated stage, because the Qur'an's religion is the final religion.

The meaning is: "The truth does not follow their desires. Rather, We have brought to them a Book that reminds them—or by which they are reminded of—the religion that specifically pertains to them. Hence, being averse to the Qur'an means being averse to their own specific religion." This consequence is indicated in the verse by the letter *fā*ʾ ["then" in "*then from their reminder they turn aside*"].

Many exegetes have said that ascribing a reminder to them is an honorary ascription, as in the verse: *And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people, and you shall soon be questioned* (43:44). The meaning would

then be: Nay! We have brought to them their honor and glory, so they should welcome it and completely accept it. Therefore, their aversion is only an act of turning aside from their own honor and glory.

There is no doubt that the revelation of the Noble Qur'an was an honor for several groups at different levels: (1) It was an honor for the Prophet because it was revealed to him. (2) It was an honor for his household because it was revealed is their house. (3) It was an honor for Arabs because it was revealed in Arabic. (4) It was an honor for his nation because it was revealed to guide them. However, the problem with the above interpretation is that the ascription in this verse is not due to this consideration [of honor]. Instead, the ascription indicates that this religion is specifically sent for this nation, and this complies better with the first part of the verse, as we explained above.

أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ خَرْجًا فَخَرَاجُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ ۖ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(23:72) *Or is it that you ask them a recompense* (kharjan)*? But the recompense* (fa-kharāj) *of your Lord is best, and He is the best of those who provide sustenance.*

Majmaʿ al-bayān says: "*Kharāj* and *kharj* are originally the same, meaning a payment that is made and collected as a due."

This is the fourth excuse of the disbelievers which God mentions in these verses, responds to it, and rebukes them for it.

Or is it that you ask them a recompense…?: That is, are they asked to pay you some money or income as a duty.

… But the recompense of your Lord is best, and He is the best of those who provide sustenance: That is, God provides for you and you are needless of their payment. Here God declares that the Prophet is financially solvent. The Prophet is repeatedly ordered to proclaim the same idea in verses like: *Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it* (6:90, 42:23). This verse completes narrating and refuting four distinct excuses that they had:

Is it then that they do not ponder over the speech (23:68). This refers to the Qur'an.

Or is it that there has come to them that which did not come to their fathers of old (23:68). This refers to the religion that was proposed to them.

Or do they say: There is madness in him (23:70). This refers to the Prophet himself.[1]

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1 Another excuse mentioned in the above verses is: "*Or is it that they have not recognized their Messenger, so that they deny him?*" (23:69), which refers to their

Or is it that you ask them a recompense (23:72). This refers to the Prophet's approach.

وَإِنَّكَ لَتَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٧٣﴾ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ عَنِ الصِّرَاطِ لَنَاكِبُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

(23:73-74) ***And most surely you invite them to a straight path. And most surely those who do not believe in the hereafter are deviating* (la-nākibūn, from nakab and nukūb) *from the way.***

Nakab and *nukūb* mean "deviating from the path and turning aside from something."

As we said in the exposition of Chapter 1 (al-Fātiḥah), the straight path is a clear way which has no internal contradiction between its parts, and does not contravene externally from achieving its purpose, which is to get its travelers to the desired destination. This is the quality of the truth, because the truth is one whole reality; its components do not contradict or thwart one another, and it does not fail to reach its objective. Hence, the truth is a straight path. Since it was mentioned that the Prophet guides to the truth [23:70], its implication is that he guides to a straight path. Similarly, since the disbelievers are averse to the truth—as mentioned above [23:70]—it means that they deviate from the straight path and incline to other ways.

The verse specifically picks on their disbelief *in the hereafter*. This quality is mentioned in particular because the religion of truth is based on the fact that the human being has an eternal life that does not stop at death. There will be felicity in that afterlife, which should be earned by true beliefs and righteous deeds, and there will also be wretchedness that should be avoided. However, since these people deny life after death, they deviate from the truth and the straight path.

Alternatively, it can be said that the religion of truth is a set of certain duties in the form of beliefs and practices. Just like any other duty, religious duties call for inspection and retribution, and the Day of Resurrection is meant exactly for this. Now, since the people mentioned in the verse do not believe in the hereafter, religion to them is vain and pointless. The only life that they see is the material life of this world, and that is why happiness to them is restricted to material enjoyment and carnal pleasures, such as eating, drinking and so on. The implication of their mentality is that they follow

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familiarity with the Prophet. Perhaps the author did not mention this because it reduces to number three. (Trans.)

their desires, regardless of its agreement or disagreement with the truth.

To sum up these two verses [23:73-74], God telling the Prophet (saw): They will never believe in you. Why not? Because the path that you are proposing to them is a straight path, whereas they care for nothing but deviating and turning away from such a path.

وَلَوْ رَحِمْنَاهُمْ وَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِمْ مِنْ ضُرٍّ لَلَجُّوا فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾ وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَاهُمْ بِالْعَذَابِ فَمَا اسْتَكَانُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَمَا يَتَضَرَّعُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

(23:75-76) ***And if We show mercy to them and remove the distress they have, they would persist*** **(la-lajjū, from lajāj)** ***in their inordinacy, blindly wandering on*** **(yaʿmaḥun, from ʿamah).** ***And already We overtook them with chastisement, but they were not submissive*** **(istakānū)** ***to their Lord, nor do they humble themselves.***

According to al-Rāghib, *lajāj* means "persistence and stubbornness in doing something that has been prohibited," and *ʿamah* means "hesitation in some matter due to confusion." *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says:

Istakānah means *khuḍūʿ* (humility, humbleness). It is from the root *kawn* (lit. to "be") in the form *istifʿāl* (meaning to seek and want something). Therefore it [*istakānah*] means "seeking to be in a state of humility."

And if We show mercy to them…: This part of the verse explains and emphasizes the deviation of the disbelievers from the path [that is, the straight path of religion that the Prophet was calling to]. God is saying that if We were to show mercy to them and remove their distress, they would still not turn back from their ways to respond to Our mercy with gratitude. Instead, they would persist in their transgression from the truth and continue wandering in their rebellion. Thus, showing them mercy by removing their distress will not benefit them. Similarly, threatening them by punishment and calamity will not benefit them either, for indeed We overtook them by punishment but they did not humble themselves before Us and did not plead to Us for help. Hence, nothing avails them or brings them to the path of truth—neither showing them mercy by the removal of distress, nor sending them calamities and threats by overtaking them in chastisement.

A possible question that one may ask is: "It is a part of the human nature and instinct to turn to God at times of desperation and severance from the apparent means, as repeatedly mentioned in the Noble Qur'an. So how could it be that they are taken by chastisement yet they do not become submissive and humble?" The answer is that given the following verse [23:77], "chastisement" here [in verse 23:76] means a light punishment that does not

completely sever and disappoint the person from all means and connections.

The expressions "*if We remove the distress they have…*" (23:75) and "*… already We overtook them with chastisement*" (23:76) show that there was some punishment that befell them, and was not yet lifted from them when these verses were revealed. Perhaps that was the drought which struck the people of Mecca, as mentioned in the narrations.

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حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ بَابًا ذَا عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ إِذَا هُمْ فِيهِ مُبْلِسُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

(23:77) ***Until when We open upon them a door of severe chastisement, lo! They are in despair at it.***

That is: In this condition that they have, neither mercy nor chastisement benefits them, until when We open upon to them a door of severe chastisement. Then they will be suddenly overtaken by despair and will lose hope from achieving any good. "Severe chastisement" here refers to death and the punishments of afterlife which follow it, as per the context of these verses and especially the following verses.

This set of verses—starting with "*Is it then that they do not ponder over the speech…*" (23:68)—ends by mentioning the punishments of the hereafter, which is similar to the ending of the previous set of verses, starting with: *Do they think that by what We aid them with of wealth and children…* (23:55). This topic of punishment in the hereafter will come up again in the verses that follow.

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Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verses 23:57-60 (*Surely they who from fear of their Lord are cautious…And those who give what they give*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "*Those who give what they give*" refers to their acts of worship and obedience.

(2) ʿĀʾishah said: Once I asked the Messenger of God, "When God says: *And those who give what they give while their hearts are full of fear* (23:60), does it refer to one who fornicates, steals and drinks wine, yet he is fearful of God?" He said, "No. It is about one who fasts, gives charity and prays, yet he fears that God may not accept from him."[1]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Fāryābī, Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's *Naʿt al-khāʾifīn*, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī's *Shuʿab al-īmān*.

(3) Concerning the word *wajilah* in "*while their hearts are full of fear* (wajilah)" (23:60) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "It means they are full of fear that God may not accept from them." In another narration he said: "It is about one who acts while he is full of fear and hope."[1]

(4) Concerning "*Until when We overtake their affluent ones with punishment*" (23:64) Qatādah said: We have been told that this was revealed concerning those whom God killed in the Battle of Badr.[2]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has narrated a similar account to this from al-Nasāʾī, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, where he says, "They are the people of Badr." However, the theme of the verses does not match this interpretation.

(5) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Abū Sufyān once came to the Prophet and said, "O Muḥammad! I ask you by God and our family ties [to help us], for indeed we are eating *al-ʿilhiz*"—which means fur mixed with blood. Then God revealed: *And already We overtook them with chastisement, but they were not submissive to their Lord, nor do they humble themselves* (23:76).[3]

Author's comment: The narrations in this regard vary from one another. What we quoted here is the most reliable of them. The narration refers to a drought that happened in Mecca and its vicinity due to the Prophet's imprecation. Most of the narrations are about events that apparently occurred after the Prophet's migration to Medina, which makes them irrelevant to the verse [because this chapter was revealed in Mecca].

(6) Concerning "*And should the truth follow their low desires*" (23:71) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "The truth" is the Messenger of God and the Commander of the Faithful [that is, Imam ʿAlī].

Author's comment: The above hadith refers to an inward meaning of the verse, as per our discussion about solid (*muḥkam*) and ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses [under verse 3:7]. The same applies to the following two narrations:

(7) Concerning "*And most surely you invite them to a straight path*" (23:73) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is, you invite them to the *wilāyah* (guardianship, authority) of the Commander of the Faithful [Imam

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*.

ʿAlī].

(8) Concerning "*deviating from the way*" (23:74) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: [It means] turning away from the Imam.

(9) Concerning "*Or is it that you ask them a recompense? But the recompense of your Lord is best, and He is the best of those who provide sustenance*" (23:72) Imam al-Bāqir said: [It means] or is it that you ask them for any reward, while the reward of your Lord is better?[1]

(10) Muḥammad b. Muslim said: I asked Imam al-Bāqir about God's words: *but they were not submissive* (istakānū, from istikānah) *to their Lord, nor do they humble themselves* (yataḍarraʿūna, from taḍarruʿ) (23:76). He said, "*Istikānah* means *khuḍūʿ* (humility, humbleness), and *taḍarruʿ* means raising the hands and begging in this way."[2]

(11) Imam ʿAlī narrated: Once the Prophet said, "Raising the hands is a form of *istikānah*." I asked, "What is *istikānah*?" He said, "Have you not read the verse: *but they were not submissive* (istakānū, from istikānah) *to their Lord, nor do they humble themselves* (23:76)?"[3]

(12) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Istikānah means *duʿāʾ* (supplication, prayer), and *taḍarruʿ* means raising the hands in *ṣalāh* (prayer).[4]

(13) Concerning "*but they were not submissive to their Lord, nor do they humble themselves*" (23:76) ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said: That is, they were not humble and submissive in supplication. Had they humbled themselves for God, He would have surely answered their call.[5]

(14) Concerning "*Until when We open upon them a door of severe chastisement*" (23:77) Imam al-Bāqir said: This is about *rajʿah* (the particular return of some people to life before the universal Resurrection).[6]

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Muqātil b. Ḥayyān, on the authority of al-Aṣbagh b. Nubātah. *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: "Al-Thaʿlabī and al-Wāḥidī have narrated this in their books of *tafsīr*."

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-ʿAskarī's *al-Mawāʿiẓ*.

6 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Verses 78-98

In the previous verses, God warned them [the polytheists] of a severe chastisement that they would not be able to escape or deflect. He refuted every possible excuse that they could have, and clarified that the only cause of their disbelief in God and the hereafter is they dislike the truth and prefer to follow their desires. In these verses, He complements that discussion by providing clear signs and irrefutable arguments that prove His unity in lordship and the return of the creatures to Him.

Then He orders the Prophet to seek refuge in Him from: (1) being afflicted by the punishment that has been promised to the polytheists; (2) the whispers of devils; and (3) the presence and company of the devils with him, just as they accompany the polytheists.

وَهُوَ الَّذِى أَنْشَأَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْـِٔدَةَ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

(23:78) ***And He it is Who originated for you the ears and the eyes and the hearts; little is it that you give thanks.***

God starts describing His blessings upon the audience by referring to ears and eyes, two organs that are unique to animals. The creation of these two organs in animals is original, unprecedented, and not based on anything similar in the simpler forms of being, such as plants, objects and elements.

Given these two senses, the creatures that are equipped with them find themselves at a new plane of existence with an immeasurably wider scope of activities compared to creatures that lack these two faculties. These creatures can understand what is good for them and what is bad, what is beneficial and what is harmful. Then they can perform voluntary movements toward what they like, and away from what they dislike. Therefore, they live in a new realm of existence with certain manifestations of beauty, pleasure, might, dominance and love, which were nowhere to be found at more primitive planes of existence.

It has been said that the verse only mentions hearing and sight out of all senses because these two are necessary and sufficient in completing the proof.

Then He mentions the "heart," which refers to the faculty of intellection and understanding in humankind. This is a bounty that is specifically given to humankind out of all animals. The salient feature of the animal world

is the physical senses. However, the creation of heart [that is, intellect] in human beings marks another plane of existence that is much higher and loftier than that. The intellect expands the power and effectiveness of the senses in practice immeasurably, compared to the rest of the animals. Thus, human beings can employ their hearing and sight to comprehend things that are absent from them and things that are present with them, things that happened before and things that exist at present. They can acquire knowledge about the details and properties of objects, either directly or through instruments.

Then, they can rise higher by their power of intellection, above sensory and particular comprehensions, to derive universal laws and think deeply about theoretical knowledge and absolute facts. They can penetrate the corners of the heavens and the earth through contemplation.

This origination of ears, eyes and hearts is due to an amazing plan of God. One cannot ever do justice in being grateful for these capacities.

…*little* (qalīlan) *is it that you give thanks*: This sentence involves a sense of rebuke. This sentence involves an omitted word. The implied meaning is: "What you thank is little gratitude," where "gratitude" is the omitted object of the verb "thank." "Little" (*qalīlan*) is an adjective for this omitted object and has taken its place.[1]

وَهُوَ الَّذِی ذَرَأَكُمْ فِی الْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

(23:79) *And He it is Who multiplied you* (dharaʾakum) *in the earth, and to Him you shall be gathered* (tuḥsharūn, from ḥashr).

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Dharʾ* means God's act of making His creatures apparent and visible. *Dharaʾa Allāhu al-khalq* means: God gave existence to individual creatures…

Ḥashr means bringing a group out of their position and moving them [collectively] toward war or the like.

The meaning is: After making you sensitive and intelligent beings, God made you appear on the earth as earthly creatures. Then He will gather you and return you to meet Him.

وَهُوَ الَّذِی يُحْيِی وَيُمِيتُ وَلَهُ اخْتِلَافُ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

1 This is based on the specific Arabic structure of the sentence, where *qalīlan* is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection. (Trans.)

(23:80) ***And He it is Who gives life and causes death, and [in] His [control] is the alternation of the night and the day; do you not then understand?***

The overall meaning of the verse is clear. This verse follows logically from the previous verse. The last verse said that God has made you intelligent beings and has made you appear in the earth, until when you are resurrected and gathered toward Him. This necessitates a cycle of life and death, because being intelligent hinges on life, and being resurrected hinges on death. That is why here it says: *And He it is Who gives life and causes death*.

… and [in] His [control] is the alternation of the night and the day.…: This again follows logically from the previous statement, because the cycle life followed by death necessitates the passing of time, meaning the sequence of night and day after one another. This is how one completes his lifespan and reaches his ordained death. In this interpretation, "*the alteration of the night and the day*" refers to their *sequence*, where one comes after the other. However, it could also refer to their alteration in terms of *length*, which results in the four seasons of the year based on the varying lengths of night and day. It is through the different seasons that animals are fed and their lives are managed, as He says: *And He made therein its foods, in four periods: alike for the seekers* (41:10).

Therefore, what is said in these three verses build on each other, and lead one to another. The origination of ears, eyes and hearts—that is, senses and intellect—for humankind [23:78] necessitates a corporeal life; meaning life in the earth until an appointed time, followed by return to God [23:79]. This in turn necessitates life and death, which consequently necessitates a temporal duration and a provision to live by [23:80].

Thus we can see, in these three verses, an outline of how human life is planned from their creation until their return to their Lord. The verses imply that since the creation of humankind belongs to God, the direction of their affairs is also in His hands, because their direction is an existential matter that is inseparable from their creation and existence. The two cannot be severed from one another. What is meant by the direction of affairs (*tadbīr*) is the system of cause and effect that governs how different things relate to one another in various ways according to their creation. God is their Lord Who directs their affairs, and to Him they shall return.

… do you not then understand?: This rhetorical question serves to rebuke the disbelievers and stir them to wake up and thus believe.

بَلْ قَالُوا مِثْلَ مَا قَالَ الْأَوَّلُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

(23:81) ***Nay, they say the like of what the ancients said:***

The question at the end of the previous verse implies a negation. The word "nay" in this verse indicates a transition from that negation. That is: No, they do not understand, but instead they say…

Comparing their speech to that of the ancient generations alludes to the root cause of the problem: what prevents them from following the truth is that they are blindly following their forefathers. That is why they have fallen into a belief that renders religion useless: denial of the hereafter. The verse also shows that clinging to the earth [that is, earthly life] and engrossment in materialism has been an ongoing custom and practice among them from the beginning, and will continue to be so till the end.

قَالُوا أَإِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

(23:82) ***They say: What! When we are dead and become dust and bones, shall we then be raised?***

This verse explains what is meant by "they say" in the previous verse. Their statement in this verse involves a tone of unlikelihood and doubt.

لَقَدْ وُعِدْنَا نَحْنُ وَآبَاؤُنَا هَٰذَا مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنْ هَٰذَا إِلَّا أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(23:83) ***Certainly we have been promised this, we and our fathers, before; this is naught but fables*** **(asāṭīr)** ***of those of old.***

Asāṭīr means "fables, superstitious stories." It is the plural of *usṭūrah*, similar to *akādhīb* (lies) which is the plural of *ukdhūbah*, as well as *aʿājīb* (wonders, marvels) which is the plural of *uʿjūbah*. The demonstrative pronoun "this" in the verse refers to the topic of resurrection. Based on the context of the verse, "before" qualifies "*we have been promised this*."[1] The promise of resurrection is in singular form [indicated by "this" (*hādhā*)], but it is described as "fables" in plural (*asāṭīr*). This is because resurrection consists of multiple events, such as reviving, gathering, mustering, reckoning, heaven and hell. Therefore, the promise of resurrection involves multiple promises, each of which is considered to be a fable.

The meaning is: The promise of resurrection is an old one. We swear that indeed we, and our forefathers, have already been promised this, yet the promised resurrection is nothing but superstitious accounts that were made up by people of the yore in the form of resurrection of the dead, reckoning

1 That is: We have *already* been promised this. (Trans.)

of deeds, heaven, hell, reward and punishment.

Their argument for calling these promises "fables" was: It has been ages that the prophets have constantly promised and threatened us about the occurrence of the Hour. If it were true and not a myth, it would have happened by now.

This clarifies two points:

(1) They said that they were already promised this from "before" as a prelude to prove their subsequent conclusion: *this is naught but fables of those of old*.

(2) There is an escalation in their speech. Their statement in the previous verse—"*What! When we are dead and become dust and bones, shall we then be raised?*" (23:82)—implied unlikelihood and doubt, but this verse implies firm denial—albeit based on a weak argument.

قُلْ لِمَنِ الْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾

(23:84) ***Say: Whose is the earth, and whoever is therein, if you know?***

After mentioning the disbelievers' doubt and denial of the resurrection, in this verse God starts a series of arguments to show its possibility based on His absolute ownership, lordship and sovereignty. The questions in these verses are addressed to the idolaters who did not believe in the resurrection. They nevertheless believed in God as the Creator of the universe, and the ultimate Lord of the lords and gods that they worshiped among His creatures. That is why His existence is taken as a given in these arguments.

Say: Whose is the earth, and whoever is therein…: Here God orders the Prophet to ask them [the polytheists] about the owner of the heavens, the earth and the intelligent beings[1] within them. Clearly, what is meant in the verse is "real ownership" (*al-milk al-ḥaqīqī*), which is where the *existence* of one thing depends on another, such that no aspect of the owned property can be assumed to stand independently from the owner. This is contrary to "conventional ownership" (*al-milk al-iʿtibārī*) that we humans have set up in our societies for social order. It is the conventional ownership that can be either valid or invalid, and which can be bought or sold. The subject of the verse is real ownership because the verse is meant to identify the source of all control and authority in creation. What determines such authority is

1 This is inferred from the use of the Arabic particle *man* (who, whoever), which is usually used for intelligent beings, although there are Qur'anic counter examples for it as well. The author's interpretation is based on the primary meaning and common usage of the particle. (Trans.)

real existential ownership, not conventional or legislative ownership.

سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ ۚ قُلْ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

(23:85) ***They will say: Allah's. Say: Will you not then mind?***

This verse states their response; they admit that the earth and everyone on it belongs to God. They have no escape from acknowledging this because the question is about a type of ownership where the property cannot exist without relying on its creative cause. The effect totally depends on the cause, such that it cannot stand independently of it in any way whatsoever. Even the idolaters admitted that the creative cause of the earth and everyone on it is God, without having any partner [in creating the universe].

… *Will you not then mind?*: After narrating their answer, the Prophet is ordered to rebuke them with this question for failing to realize how this argument proves the possibility of resurrection. The implied meaning is: Tell them: Given that God is the Owner of the earth and everyone in it, why do you not realize that He—as the Owner—has the control and authority to revive the people on earth after taking their life?

قُلْ مَنْ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ السَّبْعِ وَرَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٨٦﴾

(23:86) ***Say: Who is the Lord of the seven heavens and the Lord of the mighty Throne?***

God orders the Prophet to ask them a second question, this time about the Lord of the seven heavens and the mighty Throne. What is meant by "the Throne" (*al-ʿarsh*) in a position of central authority in the universe. It refers to a focal point at which everything is managed, all events are orchestrated, and the reign of every being is held. The verse indicates the significance and magnificence of the Throne in two ways: (1) by describing it as "mighty"; and (2) by repeating the word "Lord" before it. We presented a discussion on the Throne in our exegesis of Chapter 7 (al-Aʿrāf) [under verse 7:54].

Some exegetes have said: "Who is *the Lord of* the seven heavens?" is the same as "*Whose* are the seven heavens?" It is similar to when one asks about the owner of a house by either saying, "*Whose* is this house?" or "Who is *the lord of* this house?" They are equivalent. Therefore, when God says, "*Who is the Lord of the seven heavens*," He is asking about the *owner* of the seven heavens. That is why He narrates their answer as: *They will say: Allah's* (23:87). The answer matches the *meaning* of the question. If they had simply said "Allah" instead of "Allah's" [in verse 23:87], then their answer would match the *wording* of the question.

The problem with this view is that the lexical meaning of "lord" (*rabb*) is more specific than that of owner (*mālik*). "Lord" does not simply mean "owner," but it means "an owner who exercises control and authority over its possession and directs its affairs." If "lord" and "owner" were used interchangeably in these verses, then the polytheists would have given a different answer to the previous question: *Say: Whose is the earth, and whoever is therein, if you know? They will say: Allah's* (23:84-85). In that case, the question would be equivalent to: "Who is the Lord of the earth and whoever is therein?" The problem is that they did not believe in God's lordship over the earth and whoever is therein, for they believed in the lordship of their gods besides God. Hence, their answer would have been in favor of their gods, as opposed to admitting "Allah's". This is contrary to asking about the *owner* of the earth and whoever is therein, because then they would acknowledge that God is their Owner. The argument is: (1) You already believe that God is the Creator. (2) ownership is inseparable from creation. (3) Thus you must admit that God is Owner.

Now, if we take "lord" to be more specific than "owner," then the same problem would apply to the question in the current verse and their answer to it: *Say: Who is the Lord of the seven heavens and the Lord of the mighty Throne? They will say: [This is] Allah's* (23:86-87). The problem is that most idolaters—such as the Sabeans and others—believed in gods besides Allah for the heavens and its inhabitants, such as the sun, the moon, and other gods. Therefore, they could have answered the question about the lord of the heavens by affirming the lordship of their gods besides Allah. Then it would be wrong to claim that: "*They will say: [This is] Allah's*" (23:87), because their belief system would not require them to admit God's lordship.

What solves the problem from the root is a comprehensive study of these schools and systems of beliefs. Such examination would reveal a total lack of any principle or structure view that was unanimously agreed upon by the polytheists as a basis for their beliefs. Some of them—such as the Sabeans, Hindus and Buddhists—classified the affairs of the universe into different regions and species, like the heavens, the earth, different types of animals and plants, lands, seas, and so on. They believed that each of these had a god other than God, whom they used to worship so that it may intercede for them and bring them closer [to God]. Subsequently, they made idols to represent these gods.

However, the general scattered population living in different locations of the earth at the time, including the Arabs during the pre-Islamic era, did not have any structured system of beliefs. Some of them believed that there are gods besides God for the earth and its inhabitants, which are *represented*

by idols, while others believed that the very idols are gods. As with the heavens and its inhabitants, as well as the seas, they believed them to be under God's lordship. They viewed God to be the Lord of these parts of creation, as it can be deduced from what He narrates from Pharaoh: *O Hāmān! Build for me a tower that I may attain the means of access—the means of access to the heavens, then reach the God of Moses, and I surely think him to be a liar* (40:36-37). This shows that Pharaoh believed that what Moses called to—that is, Allah—was the god of the heavens and everything and everyone therein. They believed that the angels in the heavens are subject to God's lordship, then they are in turn lords over what lies under the heavens.

Then there were also the Sabeans and others with similar beliefs. As we said, they believed that the heavens and the heavenly bodies have gods other than Allah, namely the angels and the jinn. They believed that the angels and the jinn are immaterial beings that are completely undefiled by the realm of nature. They believed that these beings inhabit the "heavens," meaning the inner aspect and layer of this world, which would be the transcendent celestial realm where the affairs of this world are determined, from which the divine decree descends, and which is the source of natural events and forces. They believed that this transcendent realm, including its angels and other beings, is under God's lordship. Its inhabitants are gods and lords for the corporeal world, and God is the Lord of lords.

Given the above clarification, we can say that if this noble verse [23:86] is addressed to the Arab polytheists—which apparently it is—then their claimed acknowledgement that God is the Lord of the seven heavens [23:87] is true. This should be clear.

Even if the question is addressed to other polytheists—who believed in gods other than God for the [physical] heaven—then what is meant by "heavens" in the verse is not the physical heavens, but the transcendent celestial realm and its inhabitants including the angels and the jinn. This is confirmed by the addition of "*the Lord of the mighty Throne*," because the Throne is the position from which the universal laws for the entire creation are issued, including the laws that apply to their lords and gods. Clearly, they believed that the only god for that position is Allah, because nothing else is above that position. Their lords and gods of the transcendent realm have no lord other than Allah. Hence, asking about its lord and claiming that they acknowledge God's lordship over them is also true, based on what we said above.

The meaning of the verse would then be, and God knows best: Say: Who is the Lord of the seven heavens, where the affairs are determined and from which the divine decrees descend, and the Lord of the mighty Throne, which

is the issuing source of the universal laws that govern everyone from the angels down? Do you not believe [O polytheists] that your gods and their subjects all belong to God? Do you know and acknowledge that God is the One Who has given them ownership over what they own?

سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ ۚ قُلْ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾

(23:87) ***They will say: [This is]*** **Allah's.** ***Say: Will you not then guard [against evil]?***

This verse narrates their answer. They acknowledge that the seven heavens and the mighty Throne belong to God.

The meaning is: They will respond to you that these things belong to God. Then tell them with reproach and censure: Given that the seven heavens and the mighty Throne—from of which the divine command issues—belong to God, would you still disregard His wrath by continuing to deny the resurrection, counting it as the fables of the ancients, and mocking his prophets who have warned you about it? After all, it is certainly up to Him to order the resurrection of the dead and the initiation of the second creation of humankind. He can certainly issue such command from the heaven.

A subtle point to note in the expression of the verse is that it says "*Allah's*"—referring to God's ownership, not lordship—because this argument would be complete by the mere acknowledgement of God's ownership, even if one does not accept His lordship.

قُلْ مَنْ بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ يُجِيرُ وَلَا يُجَارُ عَلَيْهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

(23:88) ***Say: Who is it in Whose hand is the kingdom (malakūt) of all things and Who gives refuge, but against Him there is no refuge, if you know?***

Malakūt is the same as *mulk*, meaning "rule, dominion," but with more emphasis in the meaning. The difference between the terms *malik* (king, sovereign, ruler) and *mālik* (owner, possessor) is that the latter is "one who owns some property," while the former is "one who owns the owner and his property." Therefore, a *malik* holds one ownership on top of another, meaning that he has control and authority over both the property and its owner.

God has described His kingdom (*malakūt*) in the verse: *His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, so it is. Therefore glory be to Him in Whose hand is the kingdom* (malakūt) *of all things* (36:82-83). Based

on this verse, the *malakūt* of everything is the aspect of that thing which exists by God's command (*amr*) through the creative word "Be" (*kun*). In other words, the *malakūt* of everything is its existence as given by God.

Therefore, saying that "the *malakūt* of all things are in His hands" is a metaphorical way of saying that the creation of all that can be called a "thing" is exclusively by Him, as He says: *Allah is the Creator of all things* (6:102, 13:16, 39:62, 40:62). Thus His kingdom encompasses everything, His authority is binding upon everything, and He maintains an irrevocable rule over everything.

Now, one may suppose that even though God has universal kingdom and binding authority over everything, it is still perceivable that some of the means and causes that He has created by His command may violate His wishes and act in His creation contrary to what He wants, or prevent Him from what He wants. That is why He complements "*in Whose hand is the kingdom of all things*" by saying: *and Who gives refuge, but against Him there is no refuge*. This addition effectively implies exclusivity of kingdom and authority to Him. That is, the kingdom of the entire universe fully and literally belongs to Him, such that nothing has any sovereignty or authority over anything else that can parallel His sovereignty and authority. This means that no one can make any prevention, disruption or objection against Him, for kingdom and rule are His alone.

… and Who gives refuge* (yujīru)*, but against Him there is no refuge…: *Yujīru* is derived from *jiwār*, which originally means "neighborhood, proximity of residence." Now, neighbors have some rights over one another due to the proximity of their homes, one of which is to support and protect each other against anyone who wants to harm one of them. Some verbs derived from this root convey this aspect of protection. For example, when one person "asks for protection" from another person, it is said: *istajārahu*. When one "gives shelter" to another person, it is said: *ajārahu*.

What is mentioned in this verse applies to all of God's actions. No one and nothing can take away what God gives to any creature, whether as an initial bestowment or a continuation of a previous one. He does what He wants and gives what He wills in the way He wants and as much as He wills. Any prevention of His act or termination of His blessing is only possible with His will, which makes it something not *against* God, but *from* Him. He would be limiting one of His actions by another action of His. Meanwhile, there is no force or cause that acts in the world except that it is subject to God's control, Who can stop it from achieving its purpose. God is the One Who has given it the impact that it has; thus, it is up to Him to take away all or part of that impact from it.

… Who gives refuge, but against Him there is no refuge…: Given the above explanation, the meaning of this sentence is that He can prevent other beings from harming one another, but nothing can prevent Him if He wills to harm a being.

The verse means: Ask these deniers of resurrection: Tell me, if you know, Who is it that sole creator of all things with all their traits and effects? And Who is it that gives refuge to anyone who seeks refuge in Him, but nothing can protect against Him if He wills harm for something?

سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ ۚ قُلْ فَأَنَّىٰ تُسْحَرُونَ ﴿٨٩﴾

(23:89) *They will say: [This is] Allah's. Say: From whence are you then bewitched* (tusḥarūna, from siḥr)*?*

Some exegetes have defined *siḥr* (sorcery, magic, bewitchment) as "the appearance of something to the person in a form other than its real form." This means that the word *siḥr* (bewitchment) is not meant literally in this verse, but it is used metaphorically [referring to their misconception].

The meaning is: They will respond to you that the kingdom is Allah's. Then tell them in reproach and censure: How come the truth appears to you in the form of falsehood? If absolute sovereignty belongs to God, then He can certainly bring about a second creation and return the dead for reckoning and retribution by a single command—which is the creative command, "Be!" (*kun*).

It should also be noted that the three arguments above [in verses 23:84-89] prove not only the possibility of resurrection, but also God's Oneness in lordship. For real ownership is not separable from having authority and control over one's property, and a lord (*rabb*) is exactly one who has authority and control over his property.

بَلْ أَتَيْنَاهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

(23:90) *Nay! We have brought to them the truth, and most surely they are liars.*

"Nay" in this verse builds on an implied negation that is understood from the arguments in the previous verses. The meaning is: Given the above arguments—which the polytheists acknowledge to be true, and which prove the occurrence of the resurrection—it follows that what Our messengers have promised them is not false. Rather, We have brought to them the truth via the tongues of Our messengers, while the polytheists are liars in their claims and in their denial of the resurrection.

مَا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ مِنْ وَلَدٍ وَمَا كَانَ مَعَهُ مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ ۚ إِذًا لَذَهَبَ كُلُّ إِلَٰهٍ بِمَا خَلَقَ
وَلَعَلَا بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۚ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿٩١﴾

(23:91) ***Never did Allah take to Himself any son, and never was there with him any [other] god—in that case would each god have certainly taken away what he created, and some of them would certainly have overpowered others; glory be to Allah above what they describe!***

It was prevalent among the idolaters to consider all or some angels, some of the jinn, and some human saints to be God's children. Christians followed the same line when they claimed: *The Messiah is the son of Allah* (9:30). What they meant was a filiation and nativity where the child has some share of the reality and essence of divinity, where the child is derived and then separated from the Divine in one way or another. Thus, the child is called a deity that is born from another deity. This is "real filiation," which is contrary to "claimed filiation." What is meant by claimed filiation is that God *adopts* someone as a child in order to show the person's high status or for some other purpose. Claimed filiation does not necessitate the child partaking in the *reality* of divinity. An example of claimed filiation is what the Jews [and Christians] claim: *We are the sons of Allah and His beloved ones* (5:18). Although calling one "God's son" in this sense is also impermissible, this meaning of child is not what is meant in the current verse of discussion, because the verse is in a context of denying multiple gods and deities, while this sense of filiation does not necessitate the child's divinity.

Hence, what is meant by "taking a son" in this verse, is creating something by detaching and separating it from oneself, such that it would include some of the reality of the creator in one way or another. It is not meant in the sense of calling something that already exists as one's son due to some purpose and objective, as some exegetes have suggested.

Never did Allah take to Himself any son* (min walad)*, and never was there with him any [other] god* (min ilāh)*…: As you know, they [the polytheists] viewed the title "son" (*walad*) to be more specific than "god" (*ilāh*), because not all of their gods were God's sons. Hence, this part of the verse escalates from a particular negation regarding sons, to a more universal one that includes the other gods. Also, the Arabic particle *min* in both sentences [translated as "any"] is extra, added for emphasis.

…in that case would each god have certainly taken away what he created…: This verse argues against the belief in multiple gods by stating that it

entails certain problems.[1] The assumption that there are multiple gods only makes sense if the gods are distinct from each other in one way or another, such that they are not united in terms of their divinity and lordship. Suppose that some part of the universe or a certain species had its own lord. This means that this lord has been given independent authority to manage and direct the affairs of that part or species, without needing anything beyond itself (including the one who has entrusted that authority to it). It is also evident that if two things are distinct from one another, then what issues from them would also be distinct from one another.

The implication of this scenario is that each god is independent in how it governs its territory and directs its kingdom. This entails that there is no united, connected and consistent system of direction and management which governs different parts of the universe and various species. For example, the system that governs the human world would be severed from the systems that govern other species and beings such as the animals, the plants, the lands, the seas, the plains, the mountains, the earth and the heaven. Each of these would be disconnected from the others. This necessitates the corruption of the heavens, the earth, and everything therein. However, this is certainly not true, because there is a united system that governs the creation, with its different components being coordinated and compatible with one another.

This should clarify what is meant in this verse: *in that case would each god have certainly taken away what he created*. That is: Each god would separate from others because each of them governs its jurisdiction differently.

…and some of them would certainly have overpowered others…: This sentence mentions another problem entailed by the multiplicity of gods, forming one more argument that negates such belief. The argument can be explained as follows: There are different systems of direction of affairs (sing. *tadbīr*) in the universe. The relationship between some of them is *ʿarḍī* (horizontal, latitudinal, parallel), such as the systems that govern the land versus the sea, or the systems that govern water versus fire. Another form of relationship between the affairs in the universe is *ṭūlī* (vertical, longitudinal, causal), where one system of direction is universal and dominant, while another is particular and subordinate. Examples of this relationship are: the direction of earthly affairs versus the direction of the plants on earth; the

1 This is called proof by contradiction (*reductio ad absurdum*), where the opposite of a desired conclusion is assumed to be true as a premise, and then it is shown that it leads to a contradiction, thereby concluding that the initial premise must have been false. (Trans.)

direction of the heavens versus the direction of one heavenly body therein; and the direction of the entire corporeal world versus the direction of any single corporeal being.

In the second kind of relationship, one system is general, universal and dominant compared to its subdivisions. If the subordinate systems are cut off from the superior system, they would perish because they subsist by it. For example, if there were no earth or no system that governs earthly beings in general, then there would be neither a human world nor a system that governs it in particular.

This entails that the god which governs a general system of direction should be superior and higher than a god which has been entrusted with the direction of affairs at a more inferior and subordinate level. However, it is rationally impossible for one god to be superior to another.

Some exegetes have explained this impossibility as follows: If one god is superior to another, it means that it can overpower and defeat it. This means that the lower god is deficient in power, and in need of something beyond itself to complete it. This shows some *limit* in the lesser gods, while limitation implies *composition*, and composition is a characteristic of *contingent beings*. This is a contradiction, because gods [by definition] are necessary beings.[1]

The problem with this explanation is that the idolaters did not believe that their gods are necessary beings. They viewed their gods as contingent beings who have been entrusted with the direction of affairs of beings at lower planes of existence. They considered God to be the Lord of the gods, and the gods to be the lords of what is below them. The only necessary being to them was God, Who is the Lord of the lords and the God of the gods.

Instead, the superiority of one god over another is impossible because it contradicts the *independence* of the lower god [not because it contradicts the lower god's *necessity of being*]. If one god is subordinate to another, it follows that it needs the superior god in its authority and jurisdiction. This hierarchy entails that the lower god receives help and relies on the higher god in its actions, effects and direction of affairs. This means that the lower god is merely a *means* that is used in directing the affairs of lower beings,

1 A contingent being (*mumkin al-wujūd*) is one whose existence is not from itself, but it owes it to another source. Its existence is *contingent* on the existence and effusion of its cause. A necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*) is self-existent and self-subsistent. Existence is *necessary* for it and inseparable from its essence. According to monotheism, God is the only Necessary Being, and all other beings are contingent. (Trans.)

not another *independent god* with its own impact and effect. Therefore, it cannot be a god, but it is only a means employed in the direction of affairs. This is a contradiction of the polytheists' premise.[1]

The above is what we can deduce from contemplating the verse. The exegetes have interpreted the verse's argument in various ways, all of which are based on the idea that the belief in multiple gods entails that they are contingence beings (*mumkin*), which is a contradiction because a god must be necessarily existent (*wājūb*). However, the polytheists did not believe in the necessity of existence of any god except Allah. One exegete has gone to an extreme by interpreting the verse based on certain premises that are not referred to in the verse whatsoever, whether explicitly or implicitly. Another exegete has gone to the other extreme by saying that what is meant in the verse is casual impossibility as opposed to rational impossibility, and that the verse's argument is a persuasive one that satisfies the public (*iqnāʿī*), as opposed to a decisive, irrevocable and apodictic one for the intellectuals (*qaṭʿī*).

As we said above, the polytheists believed in their gods as *directors of affairs*, not *creators of the universe*. Yet, the verse says: *each god have certainly taken away what he created*. This is not a contradiction and should not confuse the reader, because "direction" and "creation" are inseparable from one another. There are certain forms of creation that are part and parcel of direction. For example, part of directing a general system is to create its specific components. In other words, creating the particular is part of directing the universal. Hence, there is an overlap between the act of creation and the direction of affairs. This is why God describes our actions as things that are "created" or "made," as He says: *Allah has created you and what you do* (37:96); *And He made for you of the ships and the cattle what you ride on* (43:12).

Given the above point, the polytheists effectively believed each of their gods to be a "creator" with respect to its lower planes of existence, meaning that it *acts* in that realm just as we act in ours. As with *ījād* (existentiation, giving existence to things), it is exclusively done by God alone, which is agreed upon by monotheists and polytheists alike, except for

1 The gist of the author's point is that the polytheists did not view their gods to be *necessary beings*, but they viewed them to be *independent* in their jurisdiction. In other words, in order to hold a being as a lord—which directs the affairs of the person, and whom the person worships in return—that being need not be *self-existent*, but it needs to be *independent* in its work and direction of affairs. However, *there is no independent being in the universe but God*. (Trans.)

some theologians who have not distinguished between "action" and "giving existence."

…glory be to Allah above what they describe: God finishes the verse by proclaiming His purity and transcendence [above their claims].

عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

(23:92) ***The Knower of the unseen and the seen, so may He be exalted above what they associate [with Him].***

This entire verse serves as an adjective for the noun "Allah" at the end of the last verse: *glory be to Allah above what they describe* (23:91). Given the context of these verses, the current verse is mentioned after the last verse in order to show that God knows about His transcendence and freedom from the polytheistic ascriptions of the people. Thus, it is equivalent in meaning to the verse: *Say: Do you [presume to] inform Allah of what He knows not in the heavens and the earth? Glory be to Him, and supremely exalted is He above what they set up [with Him]* (10:18).

This is an argument that negates the existence of partners for God, based on God's witness that He does not *know* any partners for Himself. It is similar to the verse "*Allah bears witness that there is no god but He*" (3:18), which is also based on His witness that He does not have any partners.[1]

Some exegetes have said:

This verse is another argument to show why some gods would overpower others. Alternatively, it shows that some gods would be necessarily ignorant, which is an imperfection for them, and contrary to the exalted position of a god. The argument is: If there were multiple gods, then obviously each of them would not know the reality of another as it knows itself. This means a form of ignorance and deficiency [which contradicts the required omniscience of a god].

This interpretation suffers from the problem as the other arguments of the exegetes against polytheism. The problem with all of them is that they only prove that multiple gods cannot all be *self-existent*, whereas the idolaters only believed in the self-existence of God, not that of their other gods. Moreover, some of the premises in the above argument can be challenged.[2]

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1 In both verses God bears witness. The difference is that in verse 3:18 God bears witness to not having any partner, but in verse 23:92 He bears witness that He does not *know* to have any partners. (Trans.)

2 That is, the exegete needs to prove why "each of them cannot know the reality

…so may He be exalted **(fa-taʿalā)** ***above what they associate [with Him]:*** This sentence is a consequence and conclusion of all of the above arguments that negate polytheism, as indicated by the word "so" (the letter *fāʾ*).

قُلْ رَبِّ إِمَّا تُرِيَنِّي مَا يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

(23:93-94) ***Say: O my Lord! If Thou shouldst make me see what they are threatened with: My Lord! Then place me not among the unjust.***

In the previous verses, God narrated the following points from the polytheists: (1) believing in partners for God; (2) denying the resurrection; and (3) mocking God's messengers. He then countered their views and provided the truth about these things. Having presented the truth, here God turns to threaten the polytheists with punishment. It is for this reason that God orders the Prophet to ask protection against God's promised punishment—in case he is alive and present at the time of its occurrence.

Say: O my Lord! If **(immā)** ***Thou shouldst make me see*** **(turiyannī)** ***what they are threatened with:*** This verse orders the Prophet to supplicate and cry to God for help. The repetition of "My Lord" (*Rabbi*) in the next verse [23:93] emphasizes the sense of pleading. The particle *immā* is in fact *in-mā* [where the letters *nūn* (n) and *mīm* (m) have merged]. The particle *mā* in *immā* is extra [that is, it does not add to the meaning of the particle *in* (lit. "if")], but it serves to validate the stress on the letter *nūn* in *turiyannī* (make me see).[1] Therefore, it is effectively a conditional statement: "*If* You indeed show me…"

… what they are threatened with…: This refers to the threats that were made earlier in this chapter. Therefore, the verse suggests that some of those threats were threats of worldly punishment [because it says, "*make me see*"].

رَبِّ فَلَا تَجْعَلْنِي فِي الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾

(23:94) ***My Lord! Then place me not among*** **(fī)** ***the unjust.***

The particle *fī* literally means "in, among." What is meant by being in or among the unjust is being subject to their punishment along with them.

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of another as it knows itself." (Trans.)

1 Since *immā* is in fact *in-mā*, if the particle *mā* is extra, *immā* would reduce to the Arabic particle *in* (lit. "if"). The stress on the letter *nūn* in *turiyannī* shows emphasis. It means: "If You should surely make me see…," or "if it shall surely come that You make me see…" (Trans.)

وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ أَنْ نُرِيَكَ مَا نَعِدُهُمْ لَقَادِرُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

(23:95) ***And most surely We are well able to make you see what We threaten them with.***

This verse serves to comfort the Prophet's. God relieves him by saying that He will show him the punishment that the polytheists have been threatened with. Perhaps it refers to their punishment in the Battle of Badr, which God made the Prophet and the believers to see, thereby healing the burning resentment in their souls.

ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ السَّيِّئَةَ ۚ نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَصِفُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

(23:96) ***Repel evil by what is best; We know best what they describe.***

The meaning is: "Retaliate their evil behavior with good. Not only that, but choose *the best form* of good." This means repelling an evil act by the best of goods. For example, if they offend you by bothering you, you should do good to them to the best of your ability. If that is not possible, then do *some* good to them. If you are not capable of that either, then overlook their misbehavior.

…We know best what they describe: This sentence is a consolation to the Prophet. What is meant is that he should not be distressed and grieved by the insolence of the polytheists against their Lord, because He is well aware of their descriptions [of Him and His religion].

وَقُلْ رَبِّ أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ هَمَزَاتِ الشَّيَاطِينِ ﴿٩٧﴾ وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ رَبِّ أَنْ يَحْضُرُونِ ﴿٩٨﴾

(23:97-98) ***And say: O my Lord! I seek refuge in Thee from the evil suggestions*** **(hamazāt, from hamzah)** ***of the devils; And I seek refuge in Thee! O my Lord! From their presence.***

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Hamzah* means severe push and repulsion. The letter *hamzah* is called as such because it is pronounced from the end of the throat with force. The Devil's *hamzah* is its thrust to sin by deceitful temptation.

Tafsīr al-Qummī says, "It [*hamzāt*] means the whispers of devils that cross your heart."

These two verses order the Prophet (s.a.w) to seek refuge in his Lord from the deceptions of devils and from their presence. They implicitly identifies the presence and whispers of the devils as *causes* which have afflicted the polytheists with denial of religion and association of partners with God.

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Verses 99-118

These verses elaborate the discussion in the previous verses about the punishment of the hereafter, meant to threaten the polytheists. These punishments begin at the time of death, continue until the Day of Resurrection, and then persist forever. The verses remind them that the life of this world, which has deceived them and turned them away from the hereafter, is very insignificant; if only they knew. God ends the sūrah by ordering the Prophet to ask Him: *O my Lord! Forgive and have mercy, and Thou art the best of the merciful* (23:118). This is the supplication that He narrates from the believers who will be felicitous in the hereafter, and it also links to the beginning of the sūrah, where it was said that the believers shall achieve salvation and inherit Paradise.

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ ﴿٩٩﴾

(23:99) ***Until when death overtakes one of them, he says: My Lord, send me back;***

In this verse, "Until" refers to the polytheists' persistent association of partners with God and their descriptions of Him, from which He is clear and free. This was the main theme in the previous verses, while the other verses were presented as interjections, asides and parenthetical remarks. The implied meaning is: They will continue this—that is, associating partners with God and describing Him by attributes that do not befit Him [23:91-92], while being deluded by the wealth and children that We have provided for them [23:55]—*until when death overtakes one of them*.

… he says: My Lord, send me back **(irjiʿūni)***:* Apparently he says "send me back" (*irjiʿūni*, in plural form) to the angels that are assigned to capture the soul [at the time of death]. Therefore, "my Lord" is an expression of appealing to God that is added as an aside in the sentence, with an implied interjection "O" which is omitted. The implied meaning is: He will say—while he pleads to God—"send me back."

Here are two alternative explanations suggested by some exegetes:

(1) *Irjiʿūni* ("send me back," in plural) is addressed to the Lord, and its plural form shows respect, glorification and high regard. It is similar to what God has narrated from Pharaoh's wife: *A refreshment of the eye to me and to you; do not slay him* (28:9) [where *lā taqtulūhu* (do not slay him) is

in plural form even though it is addressed only to Pharaoh].

(2) The plural form of the verb shows its repetition. The person will repeatedly address God: "My Lord, send me back, send me back, send me back (*irjiʿnī*)."[1] This matches a common interpretation of the following poem:

قِفَا نَبْكِ من ذِكْرَى حَبِيْبٍ و مَنْزِلِ بِسِقْطِ اللِّوَى بَيْن الدَّخُولِ فَحَوْمَل

Get up you two (*qifā*), so that we may cry
In remembrance of the beloved
And the stop we went by…[2]

The verb *qifā* in dual form (lit. "get up you two") has been interpreted as *qif qif* ("get up, get up," in singular form).

The problem with the first interpretation is that even if we accept that sometimes [the second person] plural is used for honor and respect in Arabic, it is uncommon, and God's speech cannot be interpreted according to such common usage. The problem with the second interpretation is that using a verb in plural form to indicate repetition is even more uncommon [than the suggested usage in the first interpretation].

عَلِّي أَعْمَلُ صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ ۚ كَلَّا ۚ إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا ۖ وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

(23:100) ***Haply I may* (laʿallī) *do good in that which I have left. By no means! It is a [mere] word that he speaks; and before them is a barrier until the day they are raised.***

"Haply" (*laʿalla*) is an expression of hope. The polytheists would cling to such a hope due to witnessing the imminent punishment that overshadows them. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, they give the promise of doing righteous deeds: *Therefore send us back, we will do good* (32:12). Similarly, they state the same in the form of a wish (*tamannī*, indicated by *yā laytanā*): *Would that we were* (yā laytanā) *sent back, and we would not reject the communications*

1 That is, "send me back" in plural form (*irjiʿūnī*) implies multiple exclamations of "send me back" in singular form (*irjiʿnī*). (Trans.)

2 This is the first line of the most famous of the "seven hung poems" on the door of the Kaʿbah, by Imraʾ al-Qays, a pre-Islamic Arab poet. Only the first hemistich which is relevant to this discussion is translated above. (Trans.)

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of our Lord (6:27).

…I may do good in that which I have left…: That is, so that I may do good deeds with the possessions that I left behind, by spending them in causes of good, charity, and things that would please God.

Some have interpreted it as follows: "So that I may do good in the world which I have left behind after death," where "doing good" would include not only acts of charity and financial service, but any act of worship and obedience such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage.

This interpretation is acceptable, but the first one springs more readily to the mind.

…By no means! It is a [mere] word that he speaks…: He shall not return to the world, and what he says—"*send me back, haply I may do good in that which I have left*" (23:99-100)—is only a word that he speaks, meaning a statement that is uttered without any effect or consequence. This is a way of saying that his request is rejected.

…and before them* (warāʾihim) *is a barrier* (barzakh) *until* (ilā) *the day they are raised: *Barzakh* means "a barrier between two things," as in His words: *Between them is a barrier* (barzakh) *which they cannot pass* (55:20). What is meant by "before them" is that it encompasses them from the front. It is "before them" in the sense that it seeks them. Before (*warāʾ*) in this verse means "ahead," in the same sense that the future lies ahead and faces one from the front. It is said, "Such and such a day is *warāʾaka* (before you, ahead of you)," because it is as if the future time is seeking the person to reach and pass him. It is in this sense [of seeking and catching up with someone in time] that the word *warāʾ* involves an element of *iḥāṭah* (encompassment), as some exegetes have pointed out. He says: *And there was before them* (warāʾahum) *a king who seized every boat by force* (18:79).[1]

What is meant by this "barrier" (*barzakh*) is the realm of the grave, which is the same as the imaginal world (*ʿālam al-mithāl*). It is a plane of existence where one lives after death until the rise of the Hour. This is understood from the context of the verses, and referred to in other verses. There are abundant narrations about *barzakh* through Shia chains of transmission from the Prophet and the Imams of his Household, as well as through Sunni chains of narration. We discussed this in the first volume of this book.[2]

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1 *Warāʾ* is one of those words in Arabic which have opposite meanings. It means both front and behind (spatially), before and after (temporally). The intended meaning should be inferred from the text or context. (Trans.)

2 This is under verses 2:153-157, in volume 2, pp. 197ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

Another suggested meaning is: "There is a barrier between them and this world that stops them from returning to it until the Day of Resurrection"—and it is already known that there will be no return after the Resurrection. Hence, this sentence emphasizes that they shall certainly not return, and disappoints them from coming back to this life altogether.

There are two problems with this interpretation: (1) The context suggests that the barrier is something that extend between this world and "*the day they are raised*" [indicated by the word *ilā* (until, up to)], not something that blocks them from returning to this world. If the latter were the intended meaning, then the following qualification would be meaningless: *until the day they are raised*. This qualification might implicitly suggest that there will be a return to this world after the Resurrection. However, this is not the main problem with this qualification. Instead, the qualification would be meaningless simply because it would be irrelevant and inapplicable to the intended meaning, even if we assume that they already know—from elsewhere or from the previous verses—that there shall be no return after the Resurrection.[1]

(2) The above interpretation is somewhat self-contradictory: on the one hand it says, "this sentence emphasizes that they shall certainly not return, and disappoints them from coming back to this life altogether" and on the other hand it says, "it is already known that there will be no return after the Resurrection." Instead, "*until the day they are raised*" does not disappoint them from coming back to this life altogether, but it disappoints them from it *temporarily* [because of the *ilā* (until, up to)]. The absolute negation of returning to this life is rather implied by His words: "*By no means*." Hence, what the above interpretation entails is that a temporary negation is used to emphasize an unconditional—albeit implicit—negation. The reader should reflect on this.[2]

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1 The reason why this is inapplicable is because the word *ilā* (until, up to) refers to something ahead, while the barrier (*barzakh*) is assumed to be something behind. In other words, the above view interprets *warāʾ* as "behind," as opposed to the author's view which interprets *warāʾ* as "front or ahead." (Trans.)

2 *Barzakh*, as a term that specifically refers to a realm between this world and the hereafter, is used in hadith and discussed abundantly in Islamic theology and philosophy, but it is not used in the Qur'an. In the Qur'an, *barzakh* simply means "barrier," but through *analysis* and given the *context*, this barrier as used in the current verse would *match* the above technical meaning which was developed later. The controversy between the author's view and the suggested view is primarily on how to interpret the preposition *warāʾ*. The author's interpretation is that the barrier lies *ahead* of them, while the suggested view says that it lies

فَإِذَا نُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَلَا أَنْسَابَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَلَا يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

(23:101) ***So when the Trumpet is blown, there shall be no ties of relationship between them on that day, nor shall they ask of each other.***

This verse refers to the second blow of the Trumpet, whereby the dead will rise to life. It is not about the first blow, where the living will die, as some exegetes have suggested. This is understood from the events that are discussed subsequently: annulment of ties, not asking each other, heaviness or lightness of the scale, and so on. All of these pertain to the second blow of the Trumpet.

…there shall be no ties of relationship between them…: What is meant here by negating the ties of relationship is to negate their *effectiveness*. These ties and social bonds are a result of our worldly needs, which drive humankind to have a social life based on families and households. This, in turn, leads the individuals to know and love one another, and to help and assist each other in various ways. These needs are the basis for all the means and connections that sustain worldly life. The hereafter, however, is a place where no means are effective anymore, including actions. Instead, it is a place for the *rewards and results* of actions. It is in this sense that the hereafter is no place for the worldly means, including ties of relationship and all of their implications, consequences and effects.

…nor shall they ask of each other: Here the verse mentions the most primary and apparent consequence of having ties and relationships, which

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behind them. The author's main evidence for his interpretation is the use of the preposition *ilā* (until, up to) in the verse. Perhaps we can combine both views and provide a more comprehensive interpretation as follows: "The barrier is that intermediate stage which lies ahead (*warāʾ*) of them until the day they are raise, and at the same time this barrier stops them from coming back (*warāʾ*) to this life because they are bound in another plane of existence." A more accommodating and reconciling interpretation is intrinsically preferred in cases like this, when there is both textual and contextual evidence for it. One can plausibly argue that the first part of the verse suggests a context of returning to this world. Hence, we can complement the author's first criticism by saying that the context of the verse fits both interpretations. As with his second point, the author himself admits that the absolute negation of return is only *implicitly* inferred from the word *kallā* (by no means). Therefore, there are grounds to affirm this explicitly by the subsequent part of the verse. Overall, the suggested view seems to be a self-consistent and plausible interpretation, although the author's view is more preferred. The use of the word *warāʾ* in this verse could itself be one of the subtle miracles and mysteries of the Qur'an. (Trans.)

is asking each other how the other person is doing. This question is the first step to give and get help in order to fulfill the needs of each other, make gains and avoid losses.

This verse does not contradict other verses that affirm questioning on that day, such as: *And some of them shall advance toward others, questioning each other* (37:27). There is no contradiction because the current verse negates questioning at the stage of reckoning and judgment, while the other verses affirm questioning among the people of Paradise and among the people of hell after they enter their eternal abodes.[1]

فَمَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾ وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فِي جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

(23:102-103) ***Then as for him whose scales* (mawāzinuhu)** ***are heavy, these are the successful. And as for him whose scales are light, these are they who shall have lost their souls, abiding in hell.***

Mawāzīn is either the plural of *mīzān* (scale) or the plural of *mawzūn* (that which is weighed). The latter would refer to the actions that shall be weighed on that day. We discussed the scale and its heaviness and lightness in our exposition of Sūrah al-Aʿrāf [under verses 7:8-9].

تَلْفَحُ وُجُوهَهُمُ النَّارُ وَهُمْ فِيهَا كَالِحُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

(23:104) ***The fire shall scorch* (talfaḥu, from lafḥ)** ***their faces, and they therein shall be in severe affliction* (kāliḥūna, from kulūḥ).**

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

Lafḥ and *nafḥ* mean the same, except that the former is more intense and severe than the latter. *Lafḥ* is a strike of simoom (hot, dry, violent, and dust-laden wind) on the face, while *nafḥ* is a strike of gentle wind on the face. *Kulūḥ* is the contraction of the lips, such that the teeth become visible.

The meaning is: The flames of fire will hit their faces such that their lips will contract and shrink, revealing their teeth, as seen when sheep heads are roasted.

أَلَمْ تَكُنْ آيَاتِي تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَكُنْتُمْ بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

1 Alternatively, "asking" in the current verse means "asking for help and assistance," while "asking" in the other verses means "asking to know"—which is sometimes a means of rebuke. (Trans.)

(23:105) ***Were not My communications recited to you? But you used to reject them.***

This is what they will be told.

قَالُوا رَبَّنَا غَلَبَتْ عَلَيْنَا شِقْوَتُنَا وَكُنَّا قَوْمًا ضَالِّينَ ﴿١٠٦﴾

(23:106) ***They shall say: O our Lord! Our adversity*** **(shiqwatunā)** ***overcame us and we were an erring people.***

Shiqwah, *shaqāwah* and *shaqāʾ* are the opposite of *saʿādah* (felicity, happiness, bliss). The *saʿādah* of anything is its unique and specific good. *Shaqāwah* is the lack of that. One can say that the *shaqāwah* of anything is an evil or misfortune that is unique and specific to that thing.

…Our adversity overcame us…: That is, "We were defeated and subdued by our wretchedness." By saying "our adversity" the verse attributes "adversity" to themselves. This bears a subtle point: it alludes to their involvement and responsibility in causing their wretchedness. They acquired this state through their poor choices. This is confirmed by the next verse, where they effectively promise to do good deeds: *O our Lord! Take us out of it; then if we return [to evil] surely we shall be unjust* (23:107). If they did not have free will to acquire good deeds voluntarily, then such a promise would be pointless, because they would still be in the same condition even if they were taken out of hell.

One may infer from "our adversity" [where they attribute adversity to "themselves"] that their souls necessitated adversity; that their souls are essentially wicked, and misfortune is an inseparable consequence of their essence. However, this is not true, because they say that they were "overcome" by adversity. By using this word, the verse shows that the human soul is simple and pure in and of itself. It is capable of accepting both felicity and adversity, except that in *their* case, the latter overcame and occupied the soul.[1] Therefore, the correct interpretation for "our adversity" is that "adversity" is attributed to them on the basis of their bad choices and evil actions, not on the basis of having an evil soul and essence to begin with.

Overall, this statement ["*our adversity overcame us*"] conveys two points: (1) The polytheists acknowledge that they have *no excuse* [to justify their

1 The key point here is that being "overcome or defeated" (*ghalabah*) is not used for an essential property of the subject. It rather implies that there is some *external* force and event—that is, external to its essence—which overcomes the subject. (Trans.)

misdeeds and wretchedness]. (2) Adversity was something that occurred to them and caught up with them *subsequently* [that is, subsequent to their essence and existence, as opposed to being a necessary and concomitant aspect of their essence and existence]. Both points can be understood by noting that this verse is mentioned as a response to the last verse: *Were not My communications recited to you? But you used to reject them* (23:105).

… and we were an erring people: This statement emphasizes their previous acknowledgement: *our adversity overcame us*. They admit to their sin as an attempt to be freed from the punishment and return to the world, so that they may acquire salvation. They had seen in the world that when sinners acknowledge to their sin and wrongdoing, it counts as repentance which clears them from their sin and saves them from its consequences. Yet, they know that repentance and acknowledgement to sin are actions, while that day [that is, the Day of Resurrection] is a day of retribution, not a day of action. Hence, their acknowledgement to wrongdoing is an expression of their deeply rooted traits and second natures. It is similar to their lying and denial of facts on that day, even though the truth will manifest to them and they will see it. They still lie and deny it because lying and denial have become their second nature, and are deeply established in their souls. He says: *On the day that Allah will raise them up all, then they will swear to Him as they swear to you* (58:18), and: *Then shall it be said to them: Where is that which you used to set up besides Allah? They shall say: They are gone away from us, nay, we used not to call upon anything before* (40:73-74).[1]

رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْهَا فَإِنْ عُدْنَا فَإِنَّا ظَالِمُونَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

(23:107) ***O our Lord! Take us out of it; then if we return [to evil] surely we shall be unjust.***

Given other similar verses, their real request here is to be returned to the world. They say, "*Take us out of it*" because it is the means to that ends. They want to return to the world in order to do good deeds. This way, given their abovementioned acknowledgement of their sins and repentance from wrongdoing, they would be among those "*who repent and do good*" [25:71].

قَالَ اخْسَئُوا فِيهَا وَلَا تُكَلِّمُونِ ﴿١٠٨﴾

1 The trait relevant to the current verse would their habit of superficial and insincere expressions of remorse whenever they were caught for an error and/or faced the consequence of their misdeeds, only to get out of that trouble, but without real intention to repent. (Trans.)

(23:108) ***He shall say: Go away*** **(ikhsaʾū)** ***into it and speak not to Me;***

Al-Rāghib says: "*Khasaʾtu al-kalba fa-khasaʾa* means: I rebuffed and shooed the dog with disdain, and thus it retracted. It is when one says to a dog: *ikhsaʾ* (shoo, get lost)." Therefore, its usage here is metaphorical. What is meant is that they are driven away, distanced and not spoken to.

إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِى يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الرَّاحِمِينَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

(23:109) ***Surely there was a party of My servants who said: O our Lord! We believe, so do Thou forgive us and have mercy on us, and Thou art the best of the merciful.***

This verse refers to those who were believers [in God and His religion] in this life. It relates to the previous verses because belief is a return and repentance to God, as God has sometimes used belief and repentance interchangeably in His Book. Clearly, their request for being shown mercy is a request for God's *special* mercy which is for believers in particular. They want God to make them felicitous, which means that they want His assistance to do righteous deeds and thus enter Paradise.

… and Thou art the best of the merciful: Calling God by this name is a way of appealing to Him, so that their request may be granted.

The request of the believers (as mentioned in this verse) and the request of the disbelievers (as mentioned in the previous verses) are exactly the same. Both groups express their repentance and ask to be blessed with salvation. The only difference is *when* they make this prayer! The believers do it in this world, while the disbelievers postpone it to the hereafter.

فَاتَّخَذْتُمُوهُمْ سِخْرِيًّا حَتَّىٰٓ أَنْسَوْكُمْ ذِكْرِى وَكُنْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ تَضْحَكُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾

(23:110) ***But you took them for a mockery until they made you forget My remembrance and you used to laugh at them.***

The second person pronouns [that is, "you"] refer to the disbelievers, and the third person pronouns [that is, "them, they"] refer to the believers. Given the context of the verses, "My remembrance" means remembering God by saying: *O our Lord! We believe, so do Thou forgive us and have mercy on us…* (23:109). This is how the believers remember God in this world,

which is also equivalent to how the disbelievers will remember Him in hell.[1]

…until they made you forget My remembrance…: You were distracted from My remembrance because you were engaged and engrossed in mocking the believers. The subject of this sentence [that is, "they" in "*they made you forget*"] refers to the believers. What really made the disbelievers forget the remembrance of God was their act of mocking the believers, not the believers themselves. However, the verse uses "believers" instead of "mocking the believers" in order to show that the two were equal to the disbelievers. In other words, the disbelievers' only interaction with the believers was to take them for mockery.

إِنِّي جَزَيْتُهُمُ الْيَوْمَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا أَنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

(23:111) ***Surely I have rewarded them this day because they were patient, that they are the achievers.***

"This day" refers to the Day of Retribution. What the believers were patient with is understood from the context. It is omitted for conciseness. The implied meaning is: They were patient in My remembrance despite your mocking of them for it.

…they are the achievers: Given the tone and context of the verse, this sentence implies exclusivity. It means: Only they—and not you—are the achievers.

These four verses—from "*He shall say: Go away*" (23:108) to "*they are the achievers*" (23:111)—completely disappoint the disbelievers from achieving salvation by acknowledging to their sins and asking to be returned to the world. The effective meaning of the verses is: Despair of what you seek through your acknowledgement and request, because doing so was beneficial only in the abode of action, which was the material world. There were believers among My servants who took these as a means to salvation [in the world] while you used to mock and deride them, to the point that you neglected these acts and substituted them with your mocking of the believers. Now that is the day of retribution, they are achievers by gaining the reward of what they did in the abode of action, while you remain empty-handed. It is too late to resort to action on this day [to compensate for your misdeeds], because this is a day of retribution, not action.

قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ عَدَدَ سِنِينَ ﴿١١٢﴾

1 The meaning would be: You forgot to remember Me through faith and repentance. (Trans.)

(23:112) ***He will say: How many years did you tarry in the earth?***

One of the things that God will ask the people on the Day of Resurrection is how long they stayed in the earth, which means how long they stayed in the graves, as mentioned in other verses, such as: *And at the time when the Hour shall come, the guilty shall swear [that] they did not tarry but an hour* (30:55), *On the day that they shall see what they are promised, they shall be as if they had not tarried save an hour of the day* (46:35) and other similar verses. Given these verses, we should dismiss the other interpretations suggested by the exegetes, such as: (1) The verse refers the time spent in this world. (2) It includes the total time spent in the world and the grave (*barzakh*).[1]

قَالُوا لَبِثْنَا يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ فَاسْأَلِ الْعَادِّينَ ﴿١١٣﴾

(23:113) ***They will say: We tarried a day or part of a day, but ask those who keep account.***

Given the context of the verse, "a day" means one day in this world [that is, 24 hours]. Their stay in the earth seems short to them because they compare it to the eternal life that they face on the Day of Resurrection.[2] This interpretation is confirmed by other verses where they say that they tarried "an hour" [10:45, 30:55, 46:35]—or "a single afternoon or a morning" [79:46].

…but ask those who keep account: That is, "We are not good in counting it, so ask those who have an account of it." Exegetes have interpreted "those" as angels who keep account of the days, which is a likely interpretation.

قَالَ إِنْ لَبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ۖ لَوْ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١١٤﴾

(23:114) ***He will say: You did tarry but a little—had*** **(law)** ***you but known [it]:***

The speaker in this verse is God. The first part confirms the people's

1 To see the author's argument, the reader should read all of verses 30:55-56 and 46:35. Overall, the topic of *barzakh* is not discussed anywhere in the Qur'an explicitly or elaborately, which leaves it open for multiple interpretations. The other verses in this regard are: 10:45, 17:52, 20:103-104, 79:46. Some of these verses could actually strengthen the suggested interpretations mentioned above. (Trans.)

2 In other words, "a day" is not meant literally, but what is meant is the *relative* shortness of their stay. (Trans.)

assessment of how little they stayed in their graves. It is also a prelude to the subsequent part of the verse, "*had you but known [it]*," which involves a wishful tone [that is, "only if you knew"].

The meaning is: God will say: The matter is as you said. Indeed you did not stay but a short while. I wish when you were in the world, you had known that you shall not stay in your graves but a short while before being resurrected. That way you would not deny the resurrection, and would thus not be afflicted by everlasting punishment.

The statements of God's wish (*tamannī*) in His Book are like the expressions of His hope (*tarajjī*), which show ignorance on the part of the audience or situation [not on God's part].[1]

Some exegetes have said that the Arabic particle *law* (if, had) introduces a conditional clause, where the apodosis (the main clause of a conditional sentence) is omitted. Then, in order to fix the meaning, they have offered a contrived explanation that is incompatible with the context of the verse and not approved by sound judgment.[2] Another even more unlikely interpretation is that the particle *law* means "even if" or "although." This is unacceptable because if that were the case, it should have been connected with the conjunction *wāw* (and) to the previous part.[3]

أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١١٥﴾ فَتَعَالَى اللَّهُ
الْمَلِكُ الْحَقُّ ۖ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْكَرِيمِ ﴿١١٦﴾

(23:115-116) ***What! Did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us? So exalted be Allah, the True King; no god is there but He, the Lord of the Honorable Throne.***

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1 God does not anticipate anything because He is timeless, changeless and omniscient. When He ascribes hope or wish to Himself, it reduces to uncertainty and change on the part of the creatures or their circumstances. *Tarajjī* is to hope for some event that is possible and/or near. *Tamannī* is more comprehensive: it also includes events that are impossible and/or far, as used in this verse, where their chance of knowing the matter is over. *Tarajjī* is expressed by *laʿalla* and *ʿasā*. *Tamannī* is expressed by *layta*, *hal*, *law* and *laʿalla*. Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabī), 2:148-149. (Trans.)

2 Their suggested implied meaning is: "If you knew the truth, you would not have said that you stayed a day or part of a day," where the second part is omitted. (Trans.)

3 This interpretation cannot be expressed in a meaningful way. (Trans.)

The previous verses discussed the people's encounter of death, their stay in *barzakh*, their resurrection, and their subsequent reckoning and retribution. The first verse here rebukes them for supposing that they will not be resurrected. This is an audacious insult against God because it implies that God's act [of creation] is vain. The second verse complements this by referring to the "vanity argument" [in order to prove the resurrection].

The meaning of the first verse [23:115] is: Given what We informed you—about your regret upon seeing death, your tarry in the graves, your resurrection, your reckoning and your retribution—do you still suppose that We have created you in vain, such that you just live and die without any eternal objective in your creation? Do you think that you shall not return to Us?

So exalted be Allah, the True King; no god is there but He, the Lord of the Honorable Throne: This verse alludes to an argument which proves the resurrection and refutes its denial by the disbeliever. This argument is based on *tanzīh* (proclaiming God's transcendence, purity and freedom of impurities and imperfections). Here God describes Himself by four qualities that show His purity and transcendence:

(1) He is a King.

(2) He is True.

(3) There is no god but He.

(4) He is the Lord of the Honorable Throne.

Given that He is a King, it is up to Him to rule as He wills in terms of life, death, sustenance, creation and resurrection. His rule is binding and His command is definite in His dominion. Given that He is True, what emanates from Him is naught but what is true. What emanates from the Truth qua being True is purely true, without any vanity or falsehood in it. Now, one might assume that there is another ruler in the universe who could rule against God's will and annul His rule. That is why the verse next clarifies that there is no other god but Him, meaning no other deity to be worshiped. Finally, a god is worshiped because of his lordship. Given that there is no god but Him, He alone is the Lord of the Honorable Throne of the entire universe. "Throne" means the focal point of the reign of all affairs. It refers to the position of authority, from which issue the rules and commands that govern the universe.

In short: God is the One from Whom every rule issues and everything comes to existence. Anything that He rules [in terms of legislation and religious duties] is true, and anything that He does [in terms of creation and direction of affairs] is true. That is why all things will return to Him and will subsist eternally by Him, because otherwise they would be vain and false, while there is no vanity in the creation and no falsehood in the universe.

The verse mentions these four qualities after referring to Him as "Allah," meaning One Who gives existence to others but Himself is self-existent. The four qualities are effectively *deduced* from the fact that He is Allah.

وَمَنْ يَدْعُ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا آخَرَ لَا بُرْهَانَ لَهُ بِهِ فَإِنَّمَا حِسَابُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

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(23:117) ***And whoever invokes* (yadʿu, from duʿāʾ) *with Allah another god—he has no proof of this—his reckoning is only with his Lord; surely the disbelievers shall not be successful.***

What is meant by "with Allah" in this verse is not to invoke *both* God and other gods, because most or all polytheists did not use to invoke Allah at all, but they used to *only* call and invoke the partners that they had assumed for Him. Instead, what is meant by "with Allah" is to invoke others *given* God's existence [that is, calling other gods while God is also there]. Another possibility is that *duʿāʾ* (lit. call, supplication, invocation) in this verse means *ithbāt* (to affirm, to believe), because affirming something as a god goes hand-in-hand with invoking it.[1]

…he has no proof of this…: This verse is a descriptive qualification for "another god." It means: There is no other god for whom there is any proof. Instead, there is proof for the absolute non-existence of all other gods.

…he has no proof of this—his reckoning is only with his Lord…: This is a warning. It also restricts reckoning to be with one's Lord, meaning that no one else can intervene and have a say in the person's due retribution as dictated by God. His punishment—which is hell, as explicitly mentioned in the previous verses—will certainly befall him. This effectively means a negation of intercessors and disappointment of other means of deliverance. It is then complemented by: *surely the disbelievers shall not be successful.*

وَقُلْ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ وَارْحَمْ وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الرَّاحِمِينَ ﴿١١٨﴾

(23:118) ***And say: O my Lord! Forgive and have mercy, and Thou art the best of the merciful.***

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1 Another meaning of the root *d-ʿ-w* is "to claim." The meaning would be: "Whoever claims another god with Allah," where "with Allah" means "besides Allah." This is compatible with the polytheists' belief in hierarchy of lords, where they claimed the lordship of their gods above themselves, and the lordship of Allah above their gods. Claim (*daʿwah*, *daʿwā*) in this sense would again reduce to belief and affirmation (*ithbāt*). (Trans.)

This verse ends the chapter. In it, the Prophet is ordered to say what the believers among God's servants say in this world, which will be rewarded with salvation in the Day of Resurrection, as we saw in verses 109 and 111 above: *Surely there was a party of My servants who said…*

This way, the chapter ends by what it began with: *Successful indeed are the believers* (23:1). We already discussed the meaning of the verse [under verse 23:109].

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Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Whoever withholds a karat [that is, the smallest amount] of *zakāh* (alms, poor-rate) is neither a believer nor a Muslim. This is what is meant by His words: *My Lord, send me back; haply I may do good in that which I have left* (23:99-100).[1]

Author's comment: This has also been narrated through another chain of narration from the Imam, and also from the Prophet. What is meant is to *match* the verse with one who withholds *zakāh*, not that the verse was *originally revealed* to describe this particular case only.

(2) Concerning verse 23:100 (*and before them is a barrier* (barzakh) *until the day they are raised*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Barzakh* is something that is situated between two things. Here it means the reward or punishment that one receives between the life of this world and the hereafter. This is seen in al-Ṣādiq's words: "By God what I fear for you [O Shias] is only *barzakh*, because once the matter [of your reckoning and intercession] comes to us [on the Day of Judgment], we will be more caring for you [than anyone else]."

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Author's comment: The subsequent part [that is, the hadith] is also narrated in *al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿUmar b. Yazīd.

(3) ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn said: Indeed the grave is either a garden of the gardens of Paradise, or a pit of the pits of hell.[2]

(4) Abū Wallād al-Ḥannāṭ said: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq, "May I be your ransom! The people narrate that the souls of believers [after death] will be in the craws of green birds [flying] around the Throne." He said, "That is not true. A believer is more honorable to God than having his soul placed in the craw of a bird. Rather, their souls will be in bodies similar to their bodies [in this world]."[3]

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(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The souls of the believers will be in a tree in

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

Paradise. They will eat and drink from its food and drink, and will say, "Our Lord! Raise the Hour for us! Fulfill what Thou hast promised us! And join our last with our first!"[1]

(6) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The souls of the believers will be like bodies [that is, with forms resembling bodies] in a tree in Paradise. They will recognize each other and ask about one another. Whenever a soul comes to them [from this world] they will say, "Leave him [to rest and recover], for indeed he is just arriving from a mighty terror." Afterwards, they will start asking him [the newcomer], "What happened to so-and-so? What happened to so-and-so?" If he tells them, "He was alive when I left," they will be hopeful for him [to join them]. If he says, "He died [before me]," they will conclude "So he failed! So he perished!"[2]

Author's comment: Narrations about *barzakh,* and the details of what will happen to the believers or the others in that realm are abundant and *mutawātir* (mass-transmitted, recurrent). We have presented some of them in our previous discussions.

(7) The Prophet said: Every lineage and filiation shall be cut on the Day of Resurrection except for my lineage and filiation.[3]

Author's comment: Apparently this narration is through Sunni chains of transmission, as seen in *al-Durr al-manthūr*:

(8) The Prophet said: All lineages shall indeed be cut on the Day of Resurrection except for my lineage, filiation and in-laws [that is, kinship through both blood and marriage].[4]

(9) In another narration he said: Every lineage and filiation shall be cut on the Day of Resurrection except for my lineage and filiation.[5]

(10) In another narration he said: Every blood and marital tie shall be cut on the Day of Resurrection except for my blood and marital ties.[6]

(11) Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn said: God has created Paradise for anyone who obeys [Him], even if he is an Abyssinian slave; and He has

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of several collections of hadith, on the authority of Miswar b. Makhramah.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of several collections of hadith, on the authority of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.

6 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAsākir, on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar.

created hell for anyone who disobeys [Him], even if he is a prince of Quraysh. Have you not heard the words of God: *So when the Trumpet is blown, there shall be no ties of relationship between them on that day, nor shall they ask of each other* (23:101)? By God, nothing shall avail you tomorrow except some good deed that you send ahead for yourself.[1]

Author's comment: The verse's context and tone is apparently not open to any exception. Perhaps what is meant [by the Prophetic narrations quoted above] is that one of the properties and results of the Prophet's kinship is that his descendants will find [special] assistance and help to do righteous deeds [in this world] such that they will benefit from it on the Day of Resurrection.[2]

(12) Concerning "*The fire shall scorch* (talfaḥu) *their faces*" (23:104) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "[*talfaḥu* means that] the flames of fire will capture them and burn them." Concerning "*and they therein shall be in severe affliction* (kāliḥūna)" (23:104), it says: "It [*kāliḥūna*] means that their mouths will be rendered open and their faces will be deformed [due to the severity of punishment]."

(13) Concerning verse 23:106 (*O our Lord! our adversity overcame us*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: They become wretched and misfortunate due to their actions.[3]

(14) Once a man told Imam Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad: "O Abā ʿAbd-Allāh! Indeed we have been created for a strange thing." The Imam said, "And what is that, may God be with you?" He said, "We have been created for destruction." The Imam said, "Don't say that, my [dear] nephew! Rather, we are created for eternity. After all, how can there be destruction for a Garden that is never destroyed and a Fire that is never extinguished? Rather, we only move from one abode to

1 *Al-Manāqib*, on the authority of Ṭāwūs.

2 As the author pointed out, these narrations are reported through Sunni chains of transmission, and as we saw above, they are narrated from Companions like ʿUmar and Ibn ʿUmar. These characters clearly did not narrate or interpret these narrations as primarily and specifically pertaining to the Prophet's descendants that are esteemed by Shias. This further strengthens the author's claim that these narrations are incompatible with the universal tone of the verse, which is also confirmed by other similar verses, as well as the last hadith from Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

another."[1]

(15) Concerning verses 23:112-113 (*He will say: How many years did you tarry…but ask those who keep account*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: [It means:] Ask the angels that used to count our days and record our moments and the actions that we committed in them.

(16) The Messenger of God said: When God lets the people of Paradise enter Paradise and the people of hell enter hell, He will ask the people of Paradise: "*How many years did you tarry in the earth?* [23:112]" They will reply: "*We tarried a day or part of a day* [23:113]." He will say, "Such a good trade that you made in a day or part of a day: [You have acquired] My mercy, satisfaction and Paradise. Reside therein for ever and ever!" Then He will say, "O people of hell! *How many years did you tarry in the earth?* [23:112]" They will reply: "*We tarried a day or part of a day* [23:113]." He will say, "Such a bad trade that you made in a day or part of a day: [You have acquired] My fire and wrath. Abide therein forever!"[2]

Author's comment: It is not clear how this hadith matches the verse given its context, and given evidence from other similar verses. We discussed the meaning of the verse based on the available evidence above.

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End of chapter 23

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1 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Masʿadat b. Ziyād.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of Ayfaʿ b. ʿAbd al-Kulāʿī.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

al-Nūr (The Light)

Verses 1-10

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بِسْمِاللَّهِالرَّحْمَنِالرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

The theme of this chapter is outlined by its opening verse: *(This is) a chapter which We have revealed and made obligatory and in which We have revealed clear communications so that you may be mindful*" (24:1). It states certain obligatory rules, followed by some relevant religious teachings that help the believers become heedful of them. This is certainly a Medinite chapter, as testified by its content. A key verse in this chapter is the Verse of Light (24:35).

سُورَةٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهَا وَفَرَضْنَاهَا وَأَنْزَلْنَا فِيهَا آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١﴾

(24:1) *(This is) a chapter* (sūrah) *which We have revealed and made obligatory* (faraḍnāhā, from farḍ) *and in which We have revealed clear communications so that you may be mindful.*

A *sūrah* (chapter) is "a collection of statements that pursue a common purpose." It is used in two ways in the Qur'an: (1) Sometimes *sūrah* represents the very verses that are revealed with a common theme, as seen in the current verse: *which We have revealed and made obligatory*. (2) Sometimes *sūrah* represents a "receptacle" that includes such verses as its "parts." This meaning is also used in the current verse: *in which We have revealed clear communications*.[1] *Sūrah* is a specific term that is established by the Qur'an to refer to specific sets of verses. This term is used repeatedly in God's Book. Apparently, the word is derived from *sūr al-balad*, meaning the "walls of the city," in the sense that Qur'anic chapters contain and envelope the verses in

1 In the first case, "*which We have revealed*" shows that *sūrah* is that which is revealed. In the second case, "*in which*" shows the *sūrah* is not what is primarily revealed, but it is like a container which holds communications that are revealed and sent down *into* it. (Trans.)

them [according to the second meaning]—or in the sense that they contain and envelope the common theme and purpose pursued by those verses [according to the first meaning]. Al-Rāghib says:

Farḍ is "to cut a solid object and penetrate it," such as cutting iron, flint or a bow…

Farḍ is synonymous with *ījāb* (to make obligatory, to prescribe), except that *farḍ* specifically refers to the aspect of decisively cutting [a verdict or law], while *ījāb* concerns the aspect of its establishment and enactment. He says: "*(This is) a chapter which We have revealed and made obligatory*" (24:1), which means: "We have made it obligatory on you to act according to it."…

When *farḍ* is followed by the particle *ʿalā* (on, upon, over), it refers to what God has made incumbent upon a person to do. When *farḍ* is followed by the letter *lām* (lit. "for," as in *lahu*: "for him"), it signifies God's removal of prohibition, meaning that one should not constrain oneself from doing it, as in the verse: *There is no harm in the Prophet doing that which Allah has ordained for him* (faraḍa Allāhu lahu) (33:38).

(This is) a chapter which We have revealed and made obligatory: Based on the above discussion, this sentence means: "This is a chapter that We have revealed and have made its laws obligatory acts that should be followed in practice." This includes two types of laws: commanding laws and prohibitive laws. In the first type, practicing the law means acting according to its command. In the second type, practicing means refraining from the prohibition.

…and in which We have revealed clear communications so that you may be mindful: Given the context, this part of the verse refers to the Verse of the Light and its subsequent verses, because that is where the chapter provides clear explanations and communications about the reality of belief, disbelief, monotheism and polytheism. This sentence refers to verses that remind the readers of such divine teachings.

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ ۖ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا
رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ۖ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابَهُمَا
طَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢﴾

(24:2) ***(As for) the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them* (fa-ijlidūhum, from jald)*, (giving) a hundred stripes, and let not pity* (raʾfah) *for them detain you in the matter of Allah's religion, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day, and let a group* (ṭāʾifah) *of believers witness their chastisement.***

Zinā (adultery, fornication) means "unlawful sexual intercourse." What makes intercourse lawful is one of the following: (1) marriage; (2) what resembles marriage; and (3) ownership of a female slave (*milk al-yamīn*).

Jald means "to lash with a whip," and *raʾfah* means "kindness, pity, sympathy." Some have defined *raʾfah* as "having compassion to someone in pain." *Ṭāʾifah* originally means "a community of nomads that go back and forth (*yaṭūfūna*) from one place to another." It has been said that *tāʾifah* may refer to two people or even one.

(As for) the adulteress and the adulterer…: The woman and man who have committed adultery should be whipped one hundred lashes each. This is the legal penalty (*ḥadd*) for adultery according to the explicit text of the verse. However, there are two exceptions to this:

If either or both of them are married, then the penalty for a married adulterer or adulteress is to be stoned [to death] (*rajm*).

If either or both of them are slaves, then the penalty for a slave adulterer or adulteress is half [that is, 50 lashes].[1]

According to some exegetes, the verse mentions the female first because the act of adultery by her is more reprehensible, and because sexual desire is greater and stronger in females than males [on average]. The verse addresses all Muslims, and the command is to be implemented by whoever governs their community, such as the Prophet, an Imam, or a representative of an Imam.

… and let not pity for them detain you in the matter of Allah's religion (dīn)…: What is meant here is to prohibit a reduction of penalty. However, the verse prohibits "pity" which is the cause of such reduction. This is an example of mentioning a *cause* while intending its *effect*. Pity for one who deserves a certain punishment will result in being lenient with the person's deserved penalty through reduction, or perhaps total dismissal, of the punishment. That is why God adds the condition: "*in the matter of Allah's religion*," which means that such lenience is prohibited when it pertains to God's religion and shariah (divine law).

Some exegetes have interpreted the word *dīn* as "God's law," as seen in the verse: "*It was not [lawful] that he [Joseph] should take his brother under the king's law* (dīn)" (12:76), where the king's *dīn* means his law. The meaning would be: Do not show them pity in executing God's law and implementing His penalty.

… if you believe in Allah and the Last Day…: This phrase emphasizes

1 These exceptions are not drawn from the verse, but from Islamic jurisprudence. The second point is mentioned in verse 4:25. (Trans.)

the prohibition against showing leniency concerning their penalty, by making it a condition of belief in God and the hereafter.

… and let a group of believers witness their chastisement: A group of believers must attend and observe the scene of their punishment so that it may be a lesson for them. This way, they do not go near such indecency.

الزَّانِي لَا يَنْكِحُ إِلَّا زَانِيَةً أَوْ مُشْرِكَةً وَالزَّانِيَةُ لَا يَنْكِحُهَا إِلَّا زَانٍ أَوْ مُشْرِكٌ ۚ وَحُرِّمَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣﴾

(24:3) ***The adulterer shall not marry any but an adulteress or idolatress, and (as for) the adulteress, none shall marry her but an adulterer or an idolater; and it is forbidden to the believers.***

What is apparently understood from this verse, especially given its subsequent part, is that it states a legal prohibition. Even though the first part of the verse is in the form of an indicative or declarative statement (*ikhbār*), what is meant by it is a prohibition [that is, an imperative, *inshāʾ*]. Such usage is common and it shows emphasis of the prohibition.

The rule—based on narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt—is that an adulterer can only marry an adulteress or a polytheist, and an adulteress can only marry an adulterer or a polytheist under the following conditions: (1) the person's adultery becomes publicly known; (2) the person is meted out the legal penalty for it; and (3) it is not known that the person has repented from it.

Therefore, this is a decisive verse (*muḥkam*) that has not been nullified and does not need to be interpreted through another verse. The two conditions of being meted out the legal penalty and not having repented can be inferred from the order and context of the verses. The law about their marriage in this verse appears *after* the law about their legal penalty [in the last verse]. It can be inferred from this order that the law in this verse is about adulterers and adulteresses who have received the legal penalty. Similarly, the Qur'an's language and courtesy of speech is not compatible with classifying the repenters as "adulterers" or "adulteresses."

The exegetes have had long debates and a range of different views about the meaning of the verse.

Some have said: What is meant in this verse is to describe the expected behavior of those who commit such indecency. One who has corrupted his pure innate nature (*fiṭrah*) would only incline to someone like himself in terms of evil and corruption. That is why an adulterer inclines toward an adulteress who has committed a similar act as himself, or toward a polytheist

who is even more defiled. Similarly, an adulteress inclines toward an adulterer who has committed a similar act as herself, or toward a polytheist who is even more defiled. This is a general rule that pertains to the majority of people. The same has been said about what God says further below in the same chapter: *Vile women are for vile men, and vile men are for vile women* (24:26).

Some have said: What is meant is to rebuke them, in the sense that an adulterer is only worth marrying an adulteress or someone lower, who would be a polytheist; and an adulteress is only worth marrying an adulterer or someone lower, who would be a polytheist. What is meant by the word *nikāḥ* is "marriage" [that is, a lawful contract as opposed to an informal relationship]. Then, the last part of the verse—"*it is forbidden to the believers*"—refers to the beginning of the verse, meaning that adultery is forbidden to the believers.[1]

The problem with both of these views is that they do not match the context and theme of the verses in the chapter. Furthermore, the views disconnect the verse from its last part, as we noted above.

Some have said: This verse has been abrogated by the verse: *And marry those among you who are single and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves* (24:32).

The problem with this view is that the relationship between these two verses is that of a particular rule to a universal one. Stating a universal rule after a particular one does not abrogate it, unlike what some have claimed. Perhaps one could claim that this verse (24:2) has been abrogated by the following: *And do not marry the idolatresses until they believe, and certainly a believing maid is better than an idolatress woman, even though she should please you; and do not give [believing women] in marriage to idolaters until they believe, and certainly a believing servant is better than an idolater, even though he should please you; these invite to the fire, and Allah invites to the garden and to forgiveness by His will* (2:221). Although the relationship would again be that of particular to universal, it could be claimed that the tone of the universal law [in 2:221] does not allow for any exception. Hence, it would abrogate the permissibility of marriage between a believer and a polytheist.

Some exegetes have claimed: It was permissible for a Muslim woman to be married to a non-Muslim until year 6 AH (After Hijrah), at which point the law of prohibition was revealed [that is, verse 2:221]. It is possible that the current verse of discussion [24:2] was revealed before that time,

1 In other words, pronoun "it" in "*it is forbidden*" refers to "adultery," not to "marrying an adulterer" (Trans.)

while the verse of prohibition was revealed after [and thus abrogating the current verse].

There are also other views about the verse which we shall skip as their implausibility is obvious.

وَالَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَاجْلِدُوهُمْ ثَمَانِينَ جَلْدَةً وَلَا تَقْبَلُوا لَهُمْ شَهَادَةً أَبَدًا ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(24:4) ***And those who accuse*** **(yarmūna, from ramy)** ***chaste women and then do not bring four witnesses, flog them, (giving) eighty stripes, and do not admit any testimony from them ever; and those are the transgressors.***

The meaning of *ramy* is well-known (to throw, to cast). It is used metaphorically for alleging a reprehensible act to a person, such as adultery or theft. Thus, it is equivalent to *qaḍf* (accusation). The context shows that the verse is about charging chaste women (*muḥṣanāt*) with adultery.[1] "Bringing four witnesses" refers to presenting four individuals who have witnessed the adultery in order to prove the charge. If this is not established, then God's verdict is that the accusers should be whipped eighty lashes, they are called transgressors (sing. *fāsiq*), and their testimonies (*shahādah*) shall not ever be accepted [in the Muslim court].

The meaning is: Concerning those who accuse chaste women of adultery, if they do not bring four witnesses to confirm their accusation, then you should scourge them with eighty stripes and should never accept their testimony in any case again because they are transgressors.

As the reader can see, the verse is unconditional, which would include all accusers, both male and female, both free and slave. This is how the narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt interpret the verse.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٥﴾

(24:5) ***Except those who repent after that and make amends, for surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.***

1 In Sūrah al-Nisāʾ, under verse 4:24, the author states that there are three possible meanings for *muḥṣanāt*: (1) chaste women; (2) married women; and (3) free women. The context would show which of these meanings is most relevant. In the current verse the first meaning is most appropriate, although the other two are also possible. See volume 8, p. 94 of the English translation. (Trans.)

This exception pertains to the last sentence in the previous verse: *and those are the transgressors* (24:4). However, that sentence was itself a proof and basis for the rule that was mentioned before it: "*and do not admit any testimony from them ever*" (24:4), as per the theme and context of the verse. Hence, lifting the rule about their transgression implies lifting the rule about not ever accepting their testimony. Therefore, by implication, the exception in this verse would include both sentences at the end of the previous verse.

The meaning is: Except those who repent afterwards and correct their action, in which case God is surely Forgiving and Merciful. He forgives their sin and shows mercy to them. Thus He lifts His previous classification of them as transgressors, and also His previous rule that their testimony should never be accepted.

Some exegetes have said: The exception only applies to the last sentence in the previous verse. This means that if a false accuser repents after receiving the legal penalty, then his or her sin will be forgiven but his or her testimony should still never be accepted. This is contrary to the view that the exception includes both rulings.

The exegetes' disagreement over this matter goes back to a fundamental issue [in principles of jurisprudence and logic]: When an exception is mentioned after a series of statements, does it apply to all of them or does it only apply to the last one? The truth is that, in and of itself, the exception is compatible with both cases; choosing one over the other depends on contextual and circumstantial evidence in the speech. What is understood from the context of these verses is that the exception applies to the last statement, but since that statement is a basis and justification for its previous statement, then its previous statement is, by extension, included in the exception as well.

وَالَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ أَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ شُهَدَاءُ إِلَّا أَنْفُسُهُمْ فَشَهَادَةُ أَحَدِهِمْ أَرْبَعُ شَهَادَاتٍ بِاللَّهِ ۙ إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ۝٦ وَالْخَامِسَةُ أَنَّ لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ ۝٧

(24:6-7) ***And (as for) those who accuse their wives and have no witnesses except themselves, the testimony of one of these (should be taken) four times, bearing Allah to witness that he is most surely stating the truth. And the fifth (time) that the wrath of Allah be on him if he is one of the liars.***

These verses are about those who have no other witnesses but themselves.

There is no one else who witnessed the scene so that he may testify for them. Then "*the testimony of one of these*"—that is, the accuser—"*(should be taken) four times, bearing Allah to witness*"—that is, swearing by God—"*that he is most surely stating the truth*": concerning his accusation.

The two verses mean: Those who accuse their wives, if they do not have four witnesses to testify to having witnessed the scene, then each of such accusers should carry out the testimony four times, one after another, by saying, "I bring God as witness to the truth of my accusation." Then he should finish that by a fifth testimony saying: "May God's curse be upon me if I am among the liars."

It should be noted that not having witnesses in such a case is natural and only makes sense, because if the accuser were to go searching for four individuals to come and witness the scene, then by that time the two perpetrators [of adultery] would have dispersed.

وَيَدْرَأُ عَنْهَا الْعَذَابَ أَنْ تَشْهَدَ أَرْبَعَ شَهَادَاتٍ بِاللَّهِ ۙ إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٨﴾
وَالْخَامِسَةَ أَنَّ غَضَبَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهَا إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٩﴾

(24:8-9) ***And it shall avert* (yadraʾu, from darʾ) *the chastisement from her if she testify four times, bearing Allah to witness that he is most surely one of the liars; And the fifth (time) that the wrath of Allah be on her if he is stating the truth.***

Darʾ is equivalent in meaning to *dafʿ* (to deflect, to avert, to repel). Chastisement (*aḍāb*) in verse 24:8 refers to the legal penalty (*ḥadd*) of adultery. The meaning is: If the woman testifies five times in response to the testimonies of the man, then the legal penalty of adultery will be lifted from her. Her testimony would be to testify four times, saying: "I swear by God that he is one of the liars," and then to complement it by a fifth testimony, saying: "May God's curse be upon me if he is stating the truth.'"

This is called *liʿān* (mutual cursing, in Islamic law), by which the couple are automatically separated from one another.

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

(24:10) ***And were it not for Allah's grace upon you and His mercy—and that Allah is Oft-returning (to mercy), Wise!***

This verse is a conditional statement where its main clause (called the apodosis) is omitted. The omitted part can be inferred from what is mentioned as the condition. The implied meaning is: "If it were not for God's

qualities and acts of grace, mercy, return to mercy, and wisdom, then you would have been afflicted by the opposites of these attributes and actions [of God]." More elaborately, based on what is stated in the verse, the meaning is—and God knows best: If it were not for what God has graced you with—including the blessing of religion, His return [of mercy] toward the sinners [who repent], and His legislation of legal codes to organize the affairs of your life—then: (1) you would have been afflicted with wretchedness; (2) sins and errors would have destroyed you; and (3) the order of your life would have been upset due to your lack of wisdom.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Bāqir said in a hadith: Sūrah al-Nūr was revealed after Sūrah al-Nisāʾ. The proof for it is that God says in Sūrah al-Nisāʾ: *And as for those who are guilty of an indecency from among your women, call to witness against them four [witnesses] from among you; then if they bear witness, confine them to the houses until death takes them away or Allah opens some way for them* (4:15). God opened this "way" later, where He says: *(This is) a chapter which We have revealed and made obligatory and in which We have revealed clear communications so that you may be mindful. (As for) the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them, (giving) a hundred stripes, and let not pity for them detain you in the matter of Allah's religion, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day, and let a group of believers witness their chastisement* (24:1-2).[1]

(2) Concerning "*their chastisement*" (24:2) Imam al-Bāqir said: "[It means] their whipping." Concerning "*and let a group of believers witness*" (24:2) he said: "The people should gather and attend when they are scourged."[2]

(3) Imam ʿAlī said concerning "*and let not pity for them detain you in the matter of Allah's religion*" (24:2): "That is in carrying out the penalties (*hudūd*)." Concerning "*and let a group* (ṭāʾifah) *of believers witness their chastisement*" (24:2), he said: "One person is [also] called a *ṭāʾifah*."[3]

(4) Imam al-Bāqir said in a hadith: It was revealed in Medina: *The adulterer shall not marry any but an adulteress or idolatress, and [as for]*

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Sālim.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

3 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ghiyāth b. Ibrāhīm, from Imam Jaʿfar, from his father.

the adulteress, none shall marry her but an adulterer or an idolater; and it is forbidden to the believers (24:3). Thus God does not call an adulterer or an adulteress a believer. Similarly there is a tradition by the Messenger of God which is unanimously agreed upon by the scholars, where he says: "An adulterer does not fornicate while he is a believer, and a thief does not rob while he is a believer, for when they commit such acts, belief (*īmān*) will be taken off from them as a shirt is taken off [from the body]."[1]

(5) Zurārah says: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about God's words: *The adulterer shall not marry any but an adulteress or idolatress* (24:3). He said, "This is about women and men who are known for adultery. They are widely known and famous for it. Thus is the rule for the people today: If one receives the legal penalty of adultery, or is accused by it [waiting to receive the penalty], then no one [among the believers] can marry them unless their repentance is established and known."[2]

Author's comment: *Al-Kāfī* has also reported another similar hadith from the Imam, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū al-Ṣabāḥ. Another similar narration is:

(6) Imam al-Bāqir said: It is about men and women at the time of the Messenger of God who were famous for adultery. God's prohibition pertains to such men and women. The same applies to the people at this time: Whoever is known for something like that [that is, an indecency] or receives the legal penalty [for it], then you should not marry them unless you learn about their repentance.[3]

(7) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: This [verse or ruling] is only about cases [of adultery] that are done openly [that is, cases where others learn about it]… But if someone fornicates [in private] and then repents from it, he can marry as he wants.[4]

(8) ʿAbd-Allāh b. ʿUmar said: There was a woman named Umm-i Mahzūl who used to sleep with men on the condition of paying her expenses. Then one of the Prophet's Companions decided to marry her. At that point God revealed: *(as for) the adulteress, none shall marry her but an adulterer or an idolater* (24:3).[5]

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Sālim.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Sālim.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥakam b. Ḥākīm.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, al-Nasāʾī,

Author's comment: Similar accounts to this have been reported from Mujāhid in several collections of hadith.

(9) Muqātil said: When the Meccan Immigrants (Muhājirīn) came to Medina, they arrived while they were in difficult financial conditions except for a few of them. Moreover, Medina was afflicted with extreme scarcity and high prices. Meanwhile, there were open and official prostitutes among the People of the Book in the market there. There were also prostitutes among the slave girls of the Medinite Supporters (Anṣār), including Umayyah who was a bondmaid of ᶜAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy, and Nasīkah b. Umayyah who belonged to a man of Anṣār. Each of these women had raised a banner on her door, indicating that she was a prostitute. They were among the best-off people in Medina and used to help others the most.

Due to financial constraints, some Muslim Immigrants [from Mecca] were inclined to some of their income. They started consulting one another: "Why do we not marry some of these prostitutes? This way we can have a share of their food." Some of them said, "Let us seek advice from the Messenger of God." Thus they went to him and said, "O Messenger of God! Poverty is pressing us and we do not have anything to eat. Yet there are some female prostitutes among the People of the Book, their slaves, and as the slaves of Anṣār, who are earning a living for themselves in the market. Is it OK for us to marry these women and benefit from their excess income? Then once we become needless of them we will abandon them." Thus God revealed: *(as for) the adulteress, none shall marry her but an adulterer or an idolater…* (24:3). Therefore He prohibited the believers against marrying prostitutes who commit adultery openly.[1]

Author's comment: The last two narrations explain the context of revelation for only the first part of the verse—"*(as for) the adulteress, none shall marry her but an adulterer or an idolater*"—but not for the second part: *The adulterer shall not marry any but an adulteress or idolatress* (24:3).

(10) Concerning "*Except those who repent*" (24:5) *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says (summarized): There are two different views about what this

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al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mnudhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Bayhaqī's *al-Sunan*, and Abū Dāwūd's *Nāsikh*.

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

exception refers to: (1) It only refers to their transgression, but not to "*do not admit any testimony from them ever*" (24:4). (2) It refers to both points, meaning that if the person repents, then his testimony should be accepted, whether he has received the legal penalty or not. This view is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, as well as Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq.

(11) Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab said: Three individuals testified to Mughīrah b. Shuʿbah's adultery while Ziyād refrained to do so [as the fourth witness]. Therefore ʿUmar whipped the three individuals [eighty lashes]. He told them, "Repent so that your testimonies may be accepted [from now on]." Two of them repented, but Abū Bakrah did not, and thus his testimony was not accepted thereafter. Abū Bakrah and Ziyād were half-brothers, born of the same mother. When Ziyād did what he did later on [that is, identifying himself to be Muʿāwiyah's brother, meaning that his mother had slept with Abū Sufyān unlawfully], Abū Bakrah took an oath not to ever speak to him again. Thus he did not talk to him until he died.[1]

(12) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "If a slave man falsely accuses a free woman, he should be given eighty lashes." The Imam then added, "This is among the rights of all human beings [that is, irrespective of being free or slave; without any discount in case of slaves]."[2]

(13) Concerning verses 24:6-9 (*And (as for) those who accuse their wives… if he is stating the truth*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: These verses were revealed concerning *liʿān* (mutual cursing). The cause of its revelation was the following story: When the Messenger of God returned from the Battle of Tabūk, ʿUwaymir b. Sāʿidah al-ʿAjlānī—who was one of the Anṣār (Medinite Supporters)—came to him and said, "O Messenger of God! Sharīk b. al-Samḥāʾ has fornicated with my wife and now she is pregnant from him." The Messenger of God turned away from him. He repeated what he had said, and the Prophet turned away again, until he said it four times.

Then the Messenger of God entered his house, and that is when the verses of *liʿān* [24:6-9] were revealed. When the Messenger of God came out and prayed the Afternoon Prayer with the people, he said to ʿUwaymir: "Bring your wife here, for God has revealed something about you in the Qur'an." ʿUwaymir went to her and said,

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd and Ibn al-Mundhir.

2 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Ḥalabī.

"The Messenger of God has summoned you." Since she was an honorable woman among her tribe, she came along with a community [from her tribe]. When she entered the mosque, the Messenger of God said to ʿUwaymir, "Advance to the pulpit and curse yourselves." ʿUwaymir said, "How should I do this?" The Prophet said, "Go there and say: I bring God to witness that I am truthful in my accusation of her." Thus ʿUwaymir went up and said it. The Messenger of God said, "Repeat it." He repeated, and this happened up to four times. The fifth time the Prophet told him [to say], "God's curse be upon you if you are lying in your accusation of her." Thus ʿUwaymir said "*the fifth (time) that the wrath of Allah be on him if he is one of the liars*" in his accusation of her [24:7]. Then the Messenger of God told him: "This curse shall befall you if you have been a liar."

Then the Prophet told ʿUwaymir, "Stand aside," so he went back. Then the Prophet told the wife, "You should testify as he did; otherwise I will apply God's penalty to you." She looked at the faces of her community members and said, "No, I shall not disgrace these faces in this afternoon." So she advanced to the pulpit and said, "I bring God to witness that ʿUwaymir b. Sāʿidah is a liar in his accusation of me." The Messenger of God told her, "Repeat it," and thus she did up to four times. The Messenger of God told her, "Curse yourself in the fifth one in case he is truthful in his accusation of you." So she said in "*the fifth (time) that the wrath of Allah be on her if he is stating the truth*" in his accusation of her [24:9]. The Messenger of God told her, "Beware, for this curse shall befall you if you have lied."

Then the Messenger of God told the husband, "You can go now, and this woman shall never be lawful to you anymore." He said, "O Messenger of God! What about the money that I had given her?" He replied, "If you have lied [in your testimony], then that money shall be farther from you than her; and if you have been truthful, then it is hers in exchange for the lawfulness of the sexual pleasure that you have taken from her."…

Once Saʿd b. ʿUbādah complained [in a gathering of the Prophet and his Companions]: "If I were to enter on an ignoble woman [of mine] and find a man sitting at her thighs, should I keep silent—so that he does not notice—until I bring four witnesses? By God I would never be able to bring four witnesses before he finishes his

act and goes away. And if I express what I have said, then I will receive eighty lashes on my back!"

The Prophet said: "O community of Anṣār (Medinite Supporters)! Do you not hear what your head is saying?" They said, "Do not blame him, for this man is indeed protectively jealous (*ghayūr*). He has not married any woman unless she is a virgin, and whenever he divorced a woman, no man among us has dared marrying her." Saʿd b. ʿUbadah said, "O Messenger of God! May my parents be your ransom! By God I know that this law is from God and that it is the truth. Yet I was surprised by it because of what I told you." The Prophet replied, "This is what God has said." Saʿd said, "God and His Messenger have said the truth."

It was not long after this conversation, when one night Hilāl b. Umayyah, who was a cousin of Saʿd [that is, a man of Anṣār], came home from his garden [outside Medina], only to see a man with his wife. The next day he went to the Messenger of God early in the morning and said, "Last night I went to my wife, but I found a man with her. I saw him with my eyes and heard him with my ears." This upset the Messenger of God, to the point that his displeasure could be seen in his face. Hilāl said, "I see in your face that you are displeased, but by God I am truthful, and I earnestly hope that God would open up a resolution [for my case]." The Messenger of God decided to flog him [eighty lashes].

The Anṣār gathered around and said, "What Saʿd said has now befell us. Should Hilāl be scourged and his testimony be rejected?" At that point revelation began, and therefore they stopped talking since they realized the coming of revelation. God sent down these verses: *And (as for) those who accuse their wives…* (24:6ff).

The Prophet said, "Rejoice, O Hilāl! For indeed God has opened up a resolution [for you]." Hilāl replied, "Surely I was hoping this from God." The Prophet said, "Send for her." When she came, the Prophet made them curse themselves. Once that was done, the Prophet announced their separation and ruled that the child shall belong to her without being attributed to a father, and without being called illegitimate.

Then the Messenger of God said: "If she gives birth to a child with such-and-such qualities then he shall belong to her husband [Hilāl], and if she gives birth to a child with such-and-such qualities then

he shall belong to the man who is claimed to have slept with her."[1]

Author's comment: This has also been narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, from several collections of hadith, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.[2]

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 Arabs were (and are) identified by the name of their fathers. "Son of so-and-so" was equivalent to a person's last name nowadays. The last statement of the Prophet sets the child's looks and appearance as a criterion for determining his identity. In other versions of this story it says that the child was not attributed to any father. This could strengthen a suggested view by the Persian translator of *al-Mīzān*: that the Prophet said the above as a rhetorical question, implying that we shall not ascribe a child to a man based on the child's face and appearance—which was common among the Arabs before Islam. Physiognomy (*qiyāfah*) is forbidden in Islamic law. (Trans.)

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Verses 11-26

These verses refer to the famous story of *ifk* (slander, lie). According to Sunni narrations, the accused person in this story was ʿĀʾishah, the Mother of Believers (Umm al-Muʾminīn).[1] According to Shia narrations, it was Māriyah al-Qibṭiyyah (the Coptic), who was a female slave sent as a gift to the Prophet by the ruler of Egypt, titled Muqawqis. She was the mother of Ibrāhīm [son of the Prophet]. Both accounts suffer from certain problems that we shall discuss in our examination of narrations below.

That is why it is best to only discuss the text of the verses, irrespective of both accounts. What is certain is that the story of slander mentioned in these verses pertains to some member of the Prophet's household: either his wife, or his [bondwoman who was his] son's mother. This can possibly be inferred from the verse: *you deemed it an easy matter while with Allah it was grievous* (24:15). It can also be inferred from the verses that this slander spread among the Muslims and they plunged into it, and also from other allusions in the verses.

What we understand from these verses is that a member of the Prophet's household was accused of indecency [that is, adultery] by a group of Muslims. Then the story spread among the people, one passing it to another. Some of the hypocrites or "those who have sickness in their hearts" [that is, weak believers] endorsed the spread of the story, loving indecency to disperse among the believers. Thus, God revealed these verses and vindicated His Prophet.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ جاؤُ بِالْإِفْكِ عُصْبَةٌ مِنْكُمْ لا تَحْسَبُوهُ شَرًّا لَكُمْ بَلْ هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ مَا اكْتَسَبَ مِنَ الْإِثْمِ وَ الَّذِى تَوَلَّى كِبْرَهُ مِنْهُمْ لَهُ عَذابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

(24:11) ***Surely they who concocted the slander*** **(bil-ifk)** ***are a band*** **(ʿuṣbah)** ***from among you. Do not regard it an evil to you; nay, it is good for you. Every man of them shall have what he has earned of***

1 This is a title given to the Prophet's wives in verse 33:6. The author's explanations imply that this title does not apply to the Prophet's bondwomen like Māriyah. (Trans.)

sin; and [as for] him who took upon himself the main part thereof, he shall have a grievous chastisement.

According to al-Rāghib, the word *ifk* means "lie" (*kidhb*, *kadhib*) in its absolute sense [that is, without any condition or qualification]. Its root meaning is: anything that has been turned away from its original form, such as a belief that is averted from right to wrong, an act that is diverted from virtue to vice, or a speech that is turned from truth to lie. *Ifk* has been used in God's Book in all of these meanings. Al-Rāghib also says that *ʿuṣbah* means "a group of individuals that are united and support each other." It has also been said that it means "a group of ten to forty people."

The second person pronouns (that is, "you"), in this verse and the following verses, are addressed to all believers in the general sense, including the believers, the hypocrites, and those who have sickness in their hearts. Some exegetes have said that the first four pronouns—or the second, third and fourth ones—in the verses are directed at the Prophet, the accused lady, and the accused man.[1] However, this would cause a disconnection in the addresses of the verses in the chapter after the first ten verses, while up to more than twenty verses, most of the addresses are undoubtedly directed at the believers in general.

Some exegetes have said that the abovementioned three or four pronouns are addressed to the believers who were disturbed and annoyed by the story. This is even less logical than the previous claim, because not only does it cause disharmony among the verses, but it is also unwarranted [given the wording of the verses].

The article *al-* (lit. "the") in *al-ifk* is a definite article. The meaning is: "Those who came up with this lie are a party of certain individuals among you who are connected to one another." This verse alludes to a conspiracy and agreement by the liars to spread this story in order to tarnish the purity of the Prophet's household and discredit him among the people. Therefore, the main point of the predicate—"*are a band from among you*"—is that they are a "band" (*ʿuṣbah*, meaning a united and connected group) not that they are "from among you." Some exegetes have taken the emphasis to be on "from among you," thus concluding that this statement is meant to comfort the Prophet and those who were upset by the slander. However, this does

1 The first pronoun is: "*from among you*" (24:11). The next three are: "*Do not regard it an evil to you; nay, it is good for you*" (24:11) and "*when you heard it*" (24:12). (Trans.)

not comply with the theme of the verses.[1]

… Do not regard it an evil to you; nay, it is good for you…: This sentence is addressed to the community of believers. The event was not evil for them but it was good for them, in the sense that in a righteous society it is necessary to identify and distinguish those who pursue deviation and cause mischief. This way the society can be aware of them and take the necessary measures to correct its members. This is especially applicable to the society that is connected to the source of revelation, where revelation is sent down upon the occurrence of such events in order to admonish them and remind them of what they have neglected and taken lightly. This would make them more cautious in their religion and more heedful of what concerns them.

What we said above is confirmed by what God says next in the verse: *Every man of them shall have what he has earned of sin* (al-ithm). *Ithm* means "the evil trace and consequence that remains with a person after committing sin." Therefore, the apparent meaning of this sentence is: Those who came up with the slander can now be known and identified among you by the sign of their sin. As a result, they will be discredited in return for their intention to discredit the Prophet.

Some exegetes have said that the verse means: "It is good for them, in the sense that they will be rewarded for the false accusation that was made against them, just as the slanderers will bear the evil consequences of their sin." This interpretation is based on the verse being addressed to the victims of the slander only, which is not a plausible view as we established earlier.

… and (as for) him who took upon himself the main part thereof (kibrahu), he shall have a grievous chastisement: The pronoun in *kibrahu* (translated as "thereof") refers to *al-ifk* (the slander). Thus *kibrahu* has been interpreted as the main part or the greater share of the slander. The meaning is: Out of these slanderers, the person who carried out the main part of the slander and insisted in spreading it among the people shall have a grievous punishment.

لَوْ لا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ ظَنَّ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَ الْمُؤْمِناتُ بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ خَيْراً وَ قالُوا هذا
إِفْكٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٢﴾

1 Perhaps the exegetes have suggested this based on the next part of the verse, which implies a consolation: *Do not regard it an evil to you; nay, it is good for you*. However, this does not comply with the overall reproving tone of these verses. Moreover, the context does not suggest that the perpetrators should be attributed to the Prophet and grouped with the believers. (Trans.)

(24:12) ***Why did not the believing men and the believing women, when you heard it, think well of their own people, and say: This is an evident falsehood?***

This verse rebukes those who did not dismiss the story when they heard it, and who did not have good thoughts the accused believers.

Why did not the believing men and the believing women … think well of their own people: What is meant here is: "Why did you not think well of yourselves?" However, instead of using a pronoun (yourselves or themselves) the verse uses its corresponding noun (*their own people*). The reason for this substitution is to indicate the *reason* for what is said in the verse: The quality of being a believer should naturally prevent one from evil and indecency in both speech and action. Hence, one who dons the garment of faith should have good conjecture about others who are wearing the same garment. He should refrain from speaking of them without knowledge, because they are all like a single soul, in the sense that they are all covered by the garment of faith with its consequences and implications.

The meaning is: When you heard the slander, why did you not think well of the slandered individuals? After all, you are all believers, you belong to the same group, and the accused person is one of yourselves. It is upon a believer to think well of another believer and to not describe him by what he does not know.

… and say: This is an evident falsehood?: The believing men and women should have said: "This is a clear lie." When one hears some news about which one has no knowledge, and when one makes a claim without supporting it by evidence, that news or claim is legally ruled as a lie—regardless of whether it is true or false in the fact of matter. The proof for this is what God says in the next verse: *But as they have not brought witnesses they are liars before Allah* (24:13). The believing men and women are the target audience in this verse. Thus, what is meant is "*You* should have said: This is a clear lie…"

لَوْ لا جاءُو عَلَيْهِ بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَداءَ فَإِذْ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِالشُّهَداءِ فَأُولٰئِكَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْكاذِبُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

(24:13) ***Why did they not bring four witnesses of it? But as they have not brought witnesses they are liars before Allah.***

If they were truthful in their claim and accusation, then they should have brought evidence for it, which, in the case of adultery, is four witnesses.

Since they have not brought the witnesses, they are ruled as liars in the shariah, because a claim without evidence is ruled as false.

وَ لَوْ لا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ رَحْمَتُهُ فِي الدُّنْيا وَ الْآخِرَةِ لَمَسَّكُمْ فِيما أَفَضْتُمْ فِيهِ عَذابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٤﴾

(24:14) ***And were it not for Allah's grace upon you and His mercy in this world and the hereafter, a grievous chastisement would certainly have touched you on account of the discourse which you entered into*** **(afaḍtum fīhi, from ifāḍah).**

Ifāḍah in speech means "plunging and immersing into it."

And were it not for Allah's grace…: The conjunction "and" links this verse to "*Why … when you heard it…*" (24:12). Therefore, this verse is another rebuke against the believers. Qualifying God's grace and mercy by "*this world and the hereafter*" shows that the chastisement mentioned in this verse includes chastisement in both this world and the hereafter.

The meaning is: If it were not for God's grace and mercy upon you in this world and the hereafter, then a grievous punishment would have afflicted you in this world and the hereafter because of the slander that you plunged into.

إِذْ تَلَقَّوْنَهُ بِأَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَ تَقُولُونَ بِأَفْواهِكُمْ ما لَيْسَ لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَ تَحْسَبُونَهُ هَيِّناً وَ هُوَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٥﴾

(24:15) ***When you received it*** **(talaqqawnahu, from talaqqī)** ***with your tongues and spoke with your mouths what you had no knowledge of, and you deemed it an easy matter while with Allah it was grievous.***

"When" refers to the time of the event mentioned in the last verse: *you entered into…* (24:14). *Talaqqī* of speech means "receiving it from someone else."

… with your tongues…: This qualification shows that it was a mere transmission of the news from one tongue to another, without investigation or contemplation. Therefore, the next sentence—"*and spoke with your mouths what you had no knowledge of*"—is added as an interpretation and elaboration of this idea.

… with your mouths…: This qualification again refers to the fact that their speech was without the heart's investigation and assurance. It had no

place except in the mouths, without going any deeper.

The meaning is: You plunged and immersed into this [slander] when you received it, and passed the news from one tongue to another, speaking of what you had no knowledge of.

… and you deemed it an easy matter while with Allah it was grievous: You thought that receiving this news by your tongues and speaking about it with your mouths knowing about it is a simple matter. However, this is a grievous thing to God because it is a false allegation and slander. Moreover, since this slander is related to the Prophet, spreading it among the people would discredit him in their eyes and impair his religious call.

وَ لَوْ لا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ قُلْتُمْ ما يَكُونُ لَنا أَنْ نَتَكَلَّمَ بِهذا سُبْحانَكَ هذا بُهْتانٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٦﴾

(24:16) *And why did you not, when you heard it, say: It is not for us to say such a thing; glory be to Thee! This is a great calumny* (buhtān)?

The conjunction "and" links this verse to "*Why…when you heard it…*" (24:12), which is a second conjunction [in addition to verse 23:14], implying yet another rebuke for the believers.

… glory be to Thee…: This is a glorification of God as an aside. It is the Qur'an's custom that whenever anyone is declared to be innocent and clear of charge, it also glorifies God [meaning His clearness from flaws and defects]. *Buhtān* means *iftirā'* (false accusation, slander). It is called *buhtān* (lit. "perplexity, confusion, astonishment") because it stuns and confounds (*yabhatu*) the person who is accused. The accusation was a "great" perplexity because: (1) it was a matter of dignity and reputation, especially pertaining to the Prophet; and (2) it was a statement made without any knowledge or evidence, as He says: *But as they have not brought witnesses they are liars before Allah (*24:13). The rest of the meaning is clear.

يَعِظُكُمُ اللَّهُ أَنْ تَعُودُوا لِمِثْلِهِ أَبَداً إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآياتِ وَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٨﴾

(24:17-18) *Allah admonishes you that you should not return to the like of it ever again if you are believers. And Allah makes clear to you the communications; and Allah is Knowing, Wise.*

Here God admonishes the believers by forbidding them from committing

the same sin again. The meaning of the two verses is clear.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيا وَ الْآخِرَةِ وَ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَ أَنْتُمْ لا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(24:19) ***Surely (as for) those who love that indecency* (al-fāḥishah) *should circulate respecting those who believe, they shall have a grievous chastisement in this world and the hereafter; and Allah knows, while you do not know.***

Apparently this verse was revealed with the previous verses and relates to the story of slander and accusing others of adultery without evidence. Therefore, the significance of the word *fāḥishah* (lit. "indecency") is *justification*. It means that those who accuse others of adultery are threatened by punishment *because* adultery is indecency. Since adultery is indecency, the love to have its news disseminate among the believers is love for the circulation of indecency. The verse would then be a threat and warning against the accusers who plunged into the slander.

Al-fāḥishah here is any indecency in its absolute sense [indicated by the article *al-*], including adultery (*zinā*), slanderous accusation of adultery (*qadf*), and so on. Then, loving the circulation of *al-fāḥishah* would include loving the circulation slanderous reports among the believers, and this necessitates grievous punishment in this world and the hereafter.

Based on the above, there is no reason for interpreting "chastisement in this world" as the legal penalty (*ḥadd*) [of eighty lashes for accusation without four witnesses], because loving the spread of indecency [in its general sense] does not necessitate such penalty. Interpreting "chastisement in this world" as the legal penalty is based on restricting the unconditional wording of the verse in two ways, by saying:

(1) The article *al-* in *al-fāḥishah* is a definite article, where *al-fāḥishah* specifically means slanderous accusation.

(2) "Loving the circulation of indecency" refers specifically to the story of dissemination and the act of receiving and passing the slander by the tongue.

However, these interpretations and qualifications are against the tone and context of the verse. Moreover, an accusation would qualify the accuser for the legal penalty as soon as it occurs, without being conditional on its circulation and dissemination. Hence, if "chastisement in this world" meant the legal penalty, then there would be no reason for adding this qualification [of circulation and dissemination] in the verse.

… and Allah knows, while you do not know: This is a further emphasis and exaggeration of God's wrath and dissatisfaction that is involved in this act, although the people are unaware of it.

وَ لَوْ لا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ رَحْمَتُهُ وَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ رَؤُفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

(24:20) ***And were it not for Allah's grace on you and His mercy, and that Allah is Gentle, Compassionate.***

This is a repetition of God's favor [upon the believers].The meaning is clear.

يا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُواتِ الشَّيْطانِ وَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعْ خُطُواتِ الشَّيْطانِ فَإِنَّهُ يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشاءِ وَ الْمُنْكَرِ وَ لَوْ لا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ رَحْمَتُهُ ما زَكى مِنْكُمْ مِنْ أَحَدٍ أَبَداً وَ لكِنَّ اللَّهَ يُزَكِّي مَنْ يَشاءُ وَ اللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١﴾

(24:21) ***O you who believe! Do not follow the footsteps of the Satan, and whoever follows the footsteps of the Satan, then surely he bids the doing of indecency and evil; and were it not for Allah's grace upon you and His mercy, not one of you would have ever been pure, but Allah purifies whom He will; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.***

The first part of this verse [up to "*he bids the doing of indecency and evil*"] was discussed under verse 2:208.[1]

… and were it not for Allah's grace upon you and His mercy, not one of you would have ever been pure, but Allah purifies whom He will; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing: This is yet a third reference to God's grace and mercy as a favor [upon the believers]. It confirms that the slander was related to the Prophet, because such emphasis and repetition can only be explained due to his honor and significance before God.

The phrase "were it not" indicates a conditional sentence, just like its previous usages in the chapter. However, in this third instance of its usage, the Qur'an explicitly states the complement and apodosis: *not one of you would have ever been pure*.[2] This is a rule of reason, because the only source

1 See volume 3, p. 134 of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 This is in fact the fourth usage of this clause in the chapter. In two of the previous usages (verses 24:10 and 24:20) the apodosis was omitted, but in one of them

of good and success is God. It is also part of the Qur'an's teachings, as God says: *In Thine hand is the good* (3:26), and: *Whatever good comes to you (O man!), it is from Allah* (4:79).

… but Allah purifies whom He will; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing: This is an affirmative sentence that complements the negation in the previous sentence and builds on it. God is the One Who purifies anyone whom He wills. This matter is up to His will, and He wills purification only for those who prepare for it. Their preparation for purification is tantamount to *requesting* it from God through language capacity and disposition (*lisān al-istiʿdād*). That is why the verse says, "*and Allah is Hearing, Knowing*," meaning that He hears the call of whoever asks Him for purification, and knows the state of whoever is prepared for it.

وَ لا يَأْتَلِ أُولُوا الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَ السَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولِي الْقُرْبى وَ الْمَساكِينَ
وَ الْمُهاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَ لْيَعْفُوا وَ لْيَصْفَحُوا أَ لا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ
لَكُمْ وَ اللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

(24:22) ***And let not those of you who possess grace and abundance swear* (ya'tali, from ītilā') *against giving to the near of kin and the poor and those who have fled in Allah's way, and they should pardon and overlook. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.***

There are three meanings for the word *ītilā'*: (1) *taqṣīr* (to shorten, to fail, to default); (2) *tark* (to abandon, to stop); (3) *ḥalf* (to swear, to pledge, to vow). All of these meanings can suit the verse.

The three corresponding meanings would be: (1) Those of you who possess grace and abundance—that is, the rich—should not fail to give of their money to the near of kin, the poor and those who have migrated in God's way. (2) They should not stop giving them. (3) They should not swear to not give them [any more].

Then the verse continues: *they should pardon and overlook*. That is, the rich should rather pardon the poor and their relatives, and should overlook their faults. Then they are urged and encouraged to do so, by God saying: *Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.*

Assuming that this verse was revealed with the previous set of verses

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(verse 24:14) the apodosis was mentioned. Apparently the author is referring only to verses 24:10 and 24:20 which involve an omission. (Trans.)

and is connected to them, it suggests that some believers had decided to stop their charity to some of the individuals involved in the scandal. God forbids them from doing so and encourages them to continue giving, as we shall see below [in the narrations].

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ الْمُحْصَناتِ الْغافِلاتِ الْمُؤْمِناتِ لُعِنُوا فِي الدُّنْيا وَ الْآخِرَةِ وَ لَهُمْ عَذابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

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(24:23) ***Surely those who accuse chaste*** **(al-muḥṣanāt, from iḥṣān)** ***believing women, unaware (of the evil), are cursed in this world and the hereafter, and they shall have a grievous chastisement.*** **(24:23)**

Iḥṣān here refers to *ʿiffah* (chastity, temperance, self-restraint). The three qualities mentioned here—chastity, belief and unawareness—all serve to show the immensity of the sin. Each of these three qualities is sufficient to make such an accusation wrong, the accuser a wrongdoer, and the accused person wronged. Now, if the three qualities are combined in the person, the wrong will be greater and greater, deserving a curse and grievous punishment in this world and the hereafter. The verse has a general meaning, although its context of revelation was the story of slander in particular.

يَوْمَ تَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَلْسِنَتُهُمْ وَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِما كانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

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(24:24) ***On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them as to what they did.***

"The day" in this verse describes the time of the event mentioned in the last verse: *they shall have a grievous chastisement* (24:23).

… as to what they did: The unconditional form of this expression suggests that it pertains to all evil deeds, as the exegetes have said, not just the act of accusation discussed previously. Their tongues, hands and feet will testify to their evil deeds and accusations. The witness of each organ will be to the sin and evil that relates to that organ. For example, the tongue will testify to acts like slander, lying and backbiting, while the other limbs and organs will testify to acts like theft or walking between individuals to transmit the gossip and slander. Besides verbal sins by the tongue, the verse specifically names the hands and the feet because most physical sins are done by these limbs.

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The notion that the witness to every act will be the organ that committed can be found in these verses: *Their ears and their eyes and their skins shall bear witness against them as to what they did* (41:20); *Surely the hearing and*

the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that (17:36); *On that day We will set a seal upon their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness of what they earned* (36:65). We shall have a separate discussion—by the will of God—about the testimony of the organs on the Day of Resurrection in our exposition of Chapter 41 [under verses 41:20-22].

يَوْمَئِذٍ يُوَفِّيهِمُ اللَّهُ دِينَهُمُ الْحَقَّ وَ يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ الْمُبِينُ ﴿٢٥﴾

(24:25) *On that day Allah will pay back to them in full* (yuwaffīhim, from tawfiyah) *their just reward* (dīnahum al-ḥaqq), *and they shall know that Allah is the evident Truth.*

Dīn here means *jazāʾ* (retribution, reward, recompense), as in the verse: *Master of the Day of Retribution* (1:4). *Tawfiyah* is "to give or pay something in full." The meaning is: On the Day of Resurrection God will give them their just and due reward in full, and they will know that God is the evident Truth.

The above interpretation is based on this verse's connection to the previous verses, taking the theme and context of the verses into account. However, if we look at the verse independently, then *dīn* can be interpreted as synonymous with one's "path, approach and way of life" [that is, "religion" in its general sense]. This would produce a sublime meaning, referring to the appearance of realities on the Day of Resurrection for humans. This meaning is more consonant with the subsequent part of the verse: *and they shall know that Allah is the evident Truth* (24:25).

This is one of the most brilliant and cardinal verses of the Qur'an that explains what it means to know God (*maʿrifat Allāh*). The expression "*they shall know that Allah is the evident Truth*" tells us that God is the Truth—without any cover in any way whatsoever. He is the most evident of all evident realities, and thus He cannot be subject to ignorance (*jahl*). However, He may become subject to heedlessness (*ghaflah*) by His creation despite His ultimate brightness as the ultimate Truth. Hence, what is meant by "knowing God" is in fact "not being heedless of Him." This lifting of heedlessness is sometimes equated with knowledge. This is what shall become clear to the people on the Day of Resurrection: *they shall know that Allah is the evident Truth*.

A similar idea is found in the verse: *Certainly you were heedless of it, but now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight today is sharp* (50:22).

الْخَبِيثاتُ لِلْخَبِيثِينَ وَ الْخَبِيثُونَ لِلْخَبِيثاتِ وَ الطَّيِّباتُ لِلطَّيِّبِينَ وَ

الطَّيِّبُونَ لِلطَّيِّباتِ أُولٰئِكَ مُبَرَّؤُنَ مِمَّا يَقُولُونَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَ رِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

(24:26) *Vile women* (al-khabīthāt) *are for vile men* (lil-khabīthīn) *and vile men are for vile women. Good women* (al-ṭayyibāt) *are for good men* (lil-ṭayyibīn) *and good men are for good women—they are clear of what they (the people) say (about them). For them is forgiveness and a noble provision.*

The subsequent part of the verse—"*they are clear of what they (the people) say (about them)…*"—shows that the words *al-khabīthāt*, *al-khabīthīn*, *al-ṭayyibāt* and *al-ṭayyibīn* refer to women and men who are characterized by vileness or goodness. This verse concludes the story of slander and shares the same context. At the same time, the content of the verse itself is certainly universal [that is, it is not limited to this particular context and story].

Based on the previous verses, what determines "goodness" in this verse is belief and chastity. Chaste believers, both men and women, are good human beings who belong to one another, and because of their belief and chastity, they are legally exempt of accusation without evidence. Their belief also makes them qualified for forgiveness, as He says: *And believe in Him, He will forgive you of your faults* (46:31). Similarly, they have a noble provision, which is a good life in this world and good reward in the hereafter, as He says: *Whoever does good whether male or female and is a believer, We will most certainly make them live a happy life, and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did* (16:97).

"Vile men" and "vile women" in the verse refer to unbelievers. Their vileness (*khubth*) is their state of inner impurity that has caused them to lack of faith. The vile men and women are assigned to one another because of their similarity. Such are not free of indecency—although the verse does not affirm their indecency.[1]

Based on the above discussion we can conclude:

This verse [24:26] is universal in terms of its content. It describes *all* believing men and women by goodness, even though the verse was revealed

1 When it is said that "believers are clear of indecency," its implied meaning (*mafhūm*) is that "unbelievers are not clear of indecency." This means that indecency is compatible with their inner impurity, but it does not mean that every unbeliever is characterized by indecency. It is an *overall* affirmation of indecency for unbelievers *as a whole*, or for every individual unbeliever *potentially*, not an affirmation of indecency for every single member of the whole *in actuality*. (Trans.)

in specific circumstance as one of its applications.

The verse shows that all believers are legally considered clear of accusations against them as long as there is no evidence for it.

They are qualified for forgiveness and noble provision.

These blessings are all according to their outward and apparent status; they are honored by God because of their faith, while the disbelievers are the opposite.

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Examining Narrations

(1) ʿĀʾishah said: Whenever the Messenger of God wanted to leave on a journey he would make a draw among his wives, and whoever's name came out, the Messenger of God would take her with himself. During one of his battles he made a draw among us and my name came out. Therefore, I went with the Messenger of God, and this was after the revelation of hijab.[1] I remained in my howdah (camel-litter) whether we were traveling or resting. Thus we went until the Messenger of God finished his battle and started returning.

We came back until we were close to Medina. One night when the call of departure was made, I went outside the army to relieve myself. When I was done and was heading back to my camel, I suddenly realized that my Yemeni [Sardonyx] necklace was broken. I started groping for it, and in the meanwhile, the group that I was traveling with took up my howdah, placed it on my camel and departed, assuming that I was in it. Women at that time were skinny and did not have much meat because they used to eat only bare necessity. That is why they did not notice the lightness of my howdah when they lifted it. Not to mention that I was a young girl at that time. Thus, they made the camel stand up, and departed. I found my necklace after the army had left. When I went back to where they were, I found no one to call or be called. I tarried in the spot that I had been for a while, thinking that they will soon realize my absence and come back after me. As I was sitting there, my eyes became heavy and I fell asleep.

Ṣafwān b. al-Muʿaṭṭal al-Sulamī, alias al-Dhakwānī, was following the army from behind and traveling during the night. He got to where I was in the morning, and noticed the shadow of someone

1 This apparently refers to the Verse of Veil, 33:53. It could also mean the rule of having hijab and covering. (Trans.)

sleeping there. He came to me and recognized me—because he had seen me before the revelation of hijab. I woke up as he uttered the formula of *istirjāʿ* [that is, "*Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall surely return*" (2:156)] upon recognizing me. I immediately covered my face with my veil, and by God I did not speak a word to him nor heard anything from him except that formula of *istirjāʿ*. He made his camel sit down on its hands so that I could mount on it. He then led the camel until we reached the army in their next stop when it was hot in midday. That is what caused those who perished to perish.

The person who led the slander was ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy b. Salūl. When we arrived in Medina I fell ill for a month. The people were plunging in the rumors of the slanderers while I was completely unaware of it. The Messenger of God used to take care of me during my illnesses, but this time I did not receive the same compassion that I used to receive from him before. He would only come, say salaam, ask "How are you doing?" and then leave. That was the only thing that made me suspect something was wrong, but I had no idea of the evil that had occurred. This continued until I started recovering. One night I went out with Umm Misṭaḥ to al-Manāṣiʿ. That was our toilet area, and we [women] used to go there only at nights. That was before the building of toilets near our houses, when we still had the custom of early Arabs with regards to relieving ourselves in remote pits; we were reluctant to build toilets near our homes.

So I and Umm Misṭaḥ went out, and then we headed back toward my home [after finishing our need]. As we had lifted up our clothes, Umm Misṭaḥ tripped over her clothes, but then she cried, "Damn Misṭaḥ!" I told her, "Do you curse a man who fought in [the Battle of] Badr?" She replied, "Yes, my lady! Have you not heard what he has said?" "What?" I inquired. Then she told me about the rumors of the slanderers, which only added to my illness.

Back home, the next time that the Messenger of God came, said salaam, and asked me "How are you doing?" I said, "Would you give me permission to visit my parents?" I wanted to ask them to make sure about the news. The Messenger of God gave me permission. So I went to my parents and asked my mother, "Mom! What is it that the people are saying?" She said, "Take it easy, my

dear daughter. By God when a woman is beautiful, is loved by her husband who has fellow wives, it rarely ever happens that they do not concoct stories about her." I said, "Glory be to God! Have the people really said this?"

I cried that night until the morning. My tears did not stop running, and the kohl of sleep did not enter my eyes[1] until it was the morning and I was still weeping.

Then as revelation was withheld from the Messenger of God, he called ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Usāmah b. Zayd to give him advice about separating from his wife. Since Usāmah knew the innocence of the Prophet's household and found their love in his heart, he advised the Messenger of God as follows: "O Messenger of God, keep your wife! We do not know of her except good." However, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said, "O Messenger of God, God has not restricted you [with regards to marriage], and there are many women other than her. If you ask her slave girl, she will give you confirmation." So the Messenger of God summoned Burayrah and asked her, "O Burayrah, have you seen anything suspicious?" Burayrah said, "No, by the One Who has sent you with truth. I have not seen anything that would discredit her except that she is a young girl who sometimes falls asleep when kneading dough for her family, such that domestic animals come and eat it."

Then the Messenger of God climbed the pulpit and asked people to excuse him concerning ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy b. Salūl. He said, "O community of Muslims! Who would excuse me concerning a man who has bothered me through my household? By God I do not know about my household except good. And the man that they have identified [as the perpetrator of indecency; that is, Ṣafwān] is one about whom I do not know anything but good. He has never entered my house except with me."

Saʿd b. Muʿādh [of Aws tribe] stood up and said, "O Messenger of God, you have every excuse with me! If this man is from Aws, I will behead him. And if he is one of our Khazrajī brothers, we will do whatever you command us." Then Saʿd b. ʿUbādah [of Khazraj tribe] stood up. He was a righteous man, but he was overtaken by

1 This is an elegant metaphorical expression for lack of sleep, where sleep is compared to antimony powder which is applied to the eye for beauty or to sharpen the sight. (Trans.)

bigotry, so he said to Saʿd [ibn Muʿādh], "You are lying! By God you will not kill him and cannot kill him!" Then Usayd b. Ḥuḍayr—who was a cousin of Saʿd [ibn Muʿādh][1]—stood up and said to Saʿd b. ʿUbādah, "*You* are lying, for indeed we shall kill him, but you are a hypocrite and defend the hypocrites." Thus the two tribes of Aws and Khazraj were aroused and excited, to the point that they were about to start killing each other. All this and the Messenger of God was standing on the pulpit. The Messenger of God continually calmed them down until they stopped speaking and he also remained silent.

That day I kept crying. My tears did not stop running, and the kohl of sleep did not enter my eyes. I wept for two nights and one day with my parents, without the kohl of sleep entering my eyes, nor my tears stopping. My parents started thinking that my liver will tear apart because of my tears.

While the two of them were sitting next to me and I was weeping, a woman from Anṣār (Medinite Supporters) asked me for permission to enter. I gave her permission. She came and sat down [next to me], and started to cry with me. As we were in that condition, the Messenger of God entered and sat down. He had not sat with me ever since they had said the rumors about me. It had been a month that nothing had been revealed to him about my case. He uttered the testimony of faith (*shahādah*) when he sat. Then he said, "O ʿĀʾishah. They have told me such-and-such about you. If you have been innocent, then God will exonerate you. And if you have committed a sin, then you must ask forgiveness from God and repent to Him, for indeed when a servant acknowledges a sin and returns to God [with penance], God returns to him [with mercy and forgiveness]."

When the Messenger of God finished his speech, my tears stopped, such that I did not feel even a single drop. I told my father, "Answer the Messenger of God on my behalf." He replied, "By God I do not know what to tell the Messenger of God." I told my mother, "Answer the Messenger of God on my behalf." She answered, "By God I do not know what to tell the Messenger of God."

I was a young girl who did not know much Qur'an. So I said, "By

1 "Cousin" (*ibn ʿamm*) in these contexts means that they were from the same tribe. (Trans.)

God I know that you have heard this story to the point that it has settled in your souls and you have confirmed it [within yourselves]. So if I tell you that I am innocent—and God knows that I *am* innocent—then you will not believe me. But if I acknowledge to something before you then you will accept it—while God knows that I am innocent of it. By God I find no description for this case of mine and yours except what Joseph's father said: *But patience is graceful, and Allah it is Whose help is sought for against what you describe* (12:18)."

Then I turned aside [from the Messenger of God] and lied on my side in my bed. I was certain of my innocence at that point and knew that God would exonerate me, but by God I did not think that God would reveal verses of the Qur'an about me. I found myself to be less significant than God speaking anything about me to be recited [as revelation]. However, I was hoping that the Messenger of God would have a dream where God would clear my charge.

She continued: By God, the Messenger of God did not rise from his position, nor did anyone there leave, before it was revealed to him. He was overtaken by the intensity of revelation that used to take him, such that drops of sweat flew from him like pearls because of what was being revealed to him—even though that was a cold winter day. When that state was over, the Messenger of God recovered from it while he was smiling. The first thing that he said was: "Rejoice, O ʿĀʾishah, for indeed God has vindicated you." My mother said, "Stand up before him!" I replied, "By God I shall not stand up before him, nor shall I praise anyone except God Who has revealed my vindication." God had revealed: "*Surely they who concocted the slander are a band from among you*" (24:11), up to ten verses.

At the time Abū Bakr used to help out Misṭaḥ b. Athāthah because he was his relative and was in need. When God revealed this to clear my charge, Abū Bakr said, "By God, I will not give anything to Misṭaḥ forever because of what he has said about ʿĀʾishah." Thus God revealed: *And let not those of you who possess grace and abundance swear against giving to the near of kin and the poor…* (24:22). Then Abū Bakr said, "By God, I love God to forgive me." Thus he resumed his previous payments to Misṭaḥ and said, "I will not withdraw it from him forever."

> ʿĀʾishah continued: The Messenger of God had asked Zaynab b. Jaḥsh about me: "O Zaynab! What do you know? What have you seen?" She said, "O Messenger of God! I preserve my ear and eye [from speaking without knowledge]. I do not know of her except good." In fact she was the one among the Prophet's wives who used to be fair with me, so God protected her by piety [or used to be arrogant with me, but God protected her by piety]. Her sister Ḥamnah, on the other hand, began attacking me for her [that is, she started slandering me to raise the status of her sister], so she perished amongst the slanderers.[1]

Author's comment: This account has been narrated through other chains from ʿĀʾishah, ʿUmar, Ibn ʿAbbās, Abū Hurayrah, Abū al-Yusr al-Anṣārī, Umm Rūmān, Umm ʿĀʾishah and others, with some differences. They identify the following individuals as "*those who concocted the slander*": (1) ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy b. Salūl. (2) Misṭaḥ b. Athāthah, who fought in Badr and was one of "*the first to lead the way, of the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār*" [9:100]. (3) Ḥassān b. Thābit. (4) Hamnah, who was a sister of Zaynab, the wife of the Prophet.

In their narrations they also say that once the verses of slander [24:11ff] were revealed, the Prophet summoned these named individuals and applied the legal penalty [of eighty lashes] to them, except for ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy who was given the penalty twice. He was scourged twice because the penalty of anyone who accuses a wife of the Prophet is double.

Even though these narrations are similar in their overall trend, there are certain problems with them:

First, these accounts clearly convey that the Prophet was suspicious about ʿĀʾishah due to the slander. This is seen in his change of compassionate behavior with her during her illness until the verses were revealed. It is also seen in what she said after the revelation of the verses: "I do not thank you, but I thank God." According to some of these narrations, the Prophet sent her father to give her the good news of the revelation of her innocence, whereby she told him, "I thank God, not your friend who has sent you," referring to the Prophet. In one narration, when the Prophet advised her to repent to God if she had done anything wrong, ʿĀʾishah told him, while referring to a woman sitting at the door, "Are you not ashamed of this woman to say this?" Obviously she would not speak in this manner—which

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Muslim, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bahyaqī's *al-Shuʿab*.

involves disdain and disrespect—if she had not felt that the Prophet was suspicious about her. Not to mention that ʿUmar's account explicitly says: "There was something in the heart of the Prophet of what they had said."

In short, it is more than clear that these narrations in general suggest that the Prophet was in doubt and suspicion about her case, until her innocence was revealed. However, his status is far above this. How could this be when God says: *Why did not the believing men and the believing women, when you heard it, think well of their own people, and say: This is an evident falsehood? (*24:12). Here, God rebukes the believing men and women for having evil conjecture and not declining the slander that they had heard. This shows that having good opinion of believers is an implication of *īmān* (belief, faith). Given his status of prophethood and divine protection [that is, infallibility], the Prophet would be the first one to be characterized by this quality [of good opinion]. He would be the last one to entertain evil thoughts—which are forms of sin [49:13].

Moreover, God explicitly highlights this quality of the Prophet where He says: *And there are some of them who molest the Prophet and say: He is one who believes everything that he hears; say: A hearer of good for you (who) believes in Allah and believes the faithful and is a mercy for those of you who believe; and (as for) those who molest the Messenger of Allah, they shall have a painful punishment* (9:61).

The argument is that an act of indecency by a prophet's household would deter the people's hearts from him. That is why God should keep the wives of the prophets clear from the defilement of adultery and indecency; otherwise the whole religious call will be vain. Based on this rational argument, the wives of the prophets were chaste in reality, not just apparently. If *we* understand this argument, then the Prophet would have surely known it better. So how could he doubt and suspect his household based on an accusation or slander that had spread around?

Second, these narrations say that the slander was passing among the people for over a month from its beginning until it ended by the flogging of the slanderers. However, the rule for the legal penalty in case of accusing someone of indecency without evidence was already known: that the accuser should be flogged and the accused should be legally exonerated [right away]. So why should the Prophet postpone the legal penalty of the slanderers for such a long time and wait for revelation about it, such that it disseminates thoroughly among the people, passes from tongue to tongue, is carried by travelers to other places, and "the tear is widely opened up

against the stitch"?[1] This is while the revelation that came after did not add any new information to the previous ruling about accusation of adultery [24:4]—which said that the accused person is considered innocent in terms of the shariah, which follows outwardly established evidence.

One may rebut: The revelation asserted the innocence and chastity of ʿĀʾishah *in the fact of the matter* [not just in terms of apparent legal ruling], which is a point that goes beyond the verse about accusation of adultery [24:4]. Perhaps the Prophet's long wait was to have this point cleared.

The answer is: Throughout these sixteen verses, there is no mention of true innocence and factual chastity. These verses show no evidence to prove that. Instead, her real chastity is proven by the rational argument that we just mentioned above, that the households of the prophets must necessarily be clear from the defilement of adultery.

In the first ten verses [24:11-20], the only verse that suggests a specific declaration of ʿĀʾishah's real innocence is the following: *Why did they not bring four witnesses of it? But as they have not brought witnesses they are liars before Allah (*24:13). The verse argues that since the accusers have not brought witnesses, they are liars. However, it is obvious that not bringing witnesses only proves apparent innocence at a legal level, sufficient to vindicate the person at the court, as opposed to innocence in the fact of the matter. If one does not offer evidence and witness for an accusation, it does not necessarily follow that the accused is really innocent.

As with the last six verses [24:21-26], the relevant verse would be: *Good women are for good men…* (24:26). However, the wording of the verse conveys a universal message that asserts a general innocence which is common among all believers who are accused without evidence. Clearly such universal innocence would be only at an apparent and legal level.

The truth is that there is no escape from the above objection [that why the Prophet did not execute the penalty for accusation right away] except for the possibility that the verse about accusation of adultery [24:4] was not revealed prior to the story of slander, but it was revealed only afterwards. Thus, the reason why the Prophet postponed taking any action was due to missing God's rule for a case like that. He was waiting for the divine rule about the matter of slander.

This possibility is confirmed clearly in the above narration, where the Prophet asks the people to excuse him concerning the slanderer, followed by Saʿd b. Muʿādh's speech, his quarrel with Saʿd b. ʿUbādah, and the disagreement between Aws and Khazraj in front of the Prophet. Similarly, according

1 This is an expression in Arabic for when a problem goes out of control. (Trans.)

to the account narrated by ʿUmar, after the quarrel between Ibn Muʿādh and Ibn ʿUbādah, Ibn Muʿādh called his people: "Rise, O Aws!" and Ibn ʿUbādah called his: "Rise, O Khazraj!" Thus the two tribes started throwing shoes and stones at each other… If the verse about accusation of adultery had already been revealed and its legal penalty were known, then Saʿd b. Muʿādh would not have offered the Prophet to behead the accuser. Instead, he and the rest of the people would have said, "The rule for accusation is known and you have full authority [to implement it]."

Third, the narrations explicitly name the following individuals as the slanderers: ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy, Misṭaḥ, Ḥassān, and Hamnah. Then they say that the Prophet doubled the legal penalty for ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy, but not for the rest of them—Misṭaḥ, Ḥassān, and Hamnah. The justification given for the double penalty of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy was that whoever accuses the Prophet's wives of adultery should receive twice the penalty. This is a clear contradiction, because they were all guilty of the same accusation.

It is true that according to the narrations, ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy was the one "*who took upon himself the main part thereof*" (24:11), but no Muslim [scholar or jurist] has claimed that this description means that the person should be meted out twice the penalty. Similarly, no one has deduced that "grievous chastisement" in the subsequent part of the verse— "*and (as for) him who took upon himself the main part thereof, he shall have a grievous chastisement*" (24:11)—means double penalty.

(2) Concerning verse 24:11 (*Surely they who concocted the slander are a band from among you…*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: According to Sunni narrations, this was revealed about ʿĀʾishah, who was accused [of indecency] by the Khuzāʿah tribe in the Battle of Banī al-Muṣṭalaq. According to Shia narrations, this was revealed about Māriyah al-Qibṭiyyah, who was accused [of indecency] by ʿĀʾishah. Then it narrates from Zurārah:

I heard Imam al-Bāqir say: The Messenger of God was extremely bereaved upon the death of his son Ibrāhim [from Māriyah]. ʿĀʾishah told him, "Why are you so upset for him? He was the son of Jarīḥ." Thus the Messenger of God charged ʿAlī to go after him [Jarīḥ] and kill him.

ʿAlī took his sword and went after him. At the time, Jarīḥ al-Qibṭī (the Coptic) was in a garden. ʿAlī knocked on the garden's door. Jarīḥ went to open the door, but when he saw ʿAlī [from behind the door] he recognized anger in his face. Thus he went back and did not open the door. ʿAlī jumped over the wall into the garden and

followed him. Jarīḥ started running for his life, and when he felt that ʿAlī is about to catch him, he climbed up a palm tree. ʿAlī climbed behind him, and when he got very close to him, Jarīḥ threw himself down from the tree. As he fell down his private part was revealed, and ʿAlī saw that he has neither the male nor the female organ. ʿAlī returned to the Prophet and told him, "O Messenger of God! When you charge me with a task, should I be like a hot iron spike rubbed against fur,[1] or should I verify the matter?" He replied, "Rather, you should verify." He said, "By the One Who has sent you with truth, he is devoid of what men have, and he is devoid of what women have." Thus the Prophet said, "Praise be to God Who diverted evil from us Ahl al-Bayt."[2]

(3) ʿAbd-Allāh b. Bukayr said: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq, "May I be your ransom! When the Messenger of God ordered the killing of the Coptic man, did he know that he had been lied to or not? Because it was only through ʿAlī's verification that God spared the Coptic man." He answered, "Nay! By God he knew [that he had been lied to]. If that was the real intention of the Messenger of God [that the Coptic man should be killed], then ʿAlī would not have returned before killing the man.[3] However, the Messenger of God only said this apparently so that she [ʿĀʾishah] may drop her sin [of false allegation], but she did not drop it and did not mind the killing of a Muslim man [innocently]."[4]

Author's comment: There are other narrations that indicate the participation of others with ʿĀʾishah in this accusation. As with Jarīḥ, he was a eunuch servant of Māriyah, both of whom were sent as a gift by the Egyptian ruler Muqawqis for the Messenger of God (s.w.a.). Muqawqis sent Jarīḥ with Māriyah to serve her.

There are also certain problems with these narrations:

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1 This is a metaphorical expression for following an order blindly and without any consideration. A hot iron spike would tear away the hairs of fur abruptly. (Trans.)

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar, on the authority of Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā, on the authority of al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Faḍḍāl, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Bukayr

3 This means that the Prophet pretended to be serious in his command, but between himself and ʿAlī they knew that he does not really mean it. (Trans.)

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of ʿUbayd-Allāh b. Mūsā, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Rāshid, on the authority of Marwān b. Muslim.

First, the story suggested by these narrations does not match the verses, especially verses like: *Surely they who concocted the slander…* (24:11), *Why did not the believing men and the believing women, when you heard it, think well of their own people…* (24:12), and: *When you received it with your tongues and spoke with your mouths what you had no knowledge of…* (24:15). These verses indicate that:

(a) This was a collaborative plot by a connected network of individuals, who spread the story in order to disrepute the Prophet.

(b) That the people were passing the news by their tongues, to the point that it widely diffused among them, and this continued for some time.

(c) That they did not respect the Prophet's divine honor and sanctity in doing so.

The story depicted by these narrations is far from these points. The only possible explanation is to say that these narrations have been abridged in their portrayal of the story.

Second, the story would necessitate that the legal penalty [of eighty lashes] should be applied to the accuser, but that did not happen. The only possible response to this objection is to say that the verse outlining the penalty for accusation of adultery [24:4] was revealed quite a while after this story.

Not applying the legal penalty for accusation right away poses a problem to both accounts. To dodge this problem, we should conclude that the verses about the story of slander (*ifk*) were revealed before the verse about accusation of adultery (*qadf*). This means that the only laws that were revealed in the story of slander were the following: (a) the accused person is innocent as long no evidence is shown for the accusation; and (b) accusation of adultery [without evidence] is forbidden [but no legal penalty was decreed for it].

Had the legal penalty for unwarranted accusation been legislated *before* the story of slander, there would have been no room [for the Prophet] to delay the penalty for such a considerable time or to wait for revelation about it. Also, no accuser would have been spared of the penalty in that case. Similarly, if all of the above verses [including both the legal penalty and the story of slander] were revealed together, then there would have been some reference made to their penalty in the verses about the story, at least by having the story come right after the verse about accusation [24:4]. Those who know about the theme and flow of speech would not doubt that verses 24:11ff—"*Surely they who concocted the slander…*"—are disconnected from their previous verses.[1]

1 That is, the tone of the verses shows a shift of subject, especially given how verse

In addition, if the legal penalty of those who accuse the Prophet's wives with adultery were twice, then it would have been mentioned in the verses about the slander. That would have perfectly fit in the verses given their harsh treatment of the accusers with curse and threat of punishment.

One may answer the above by saying that perhaps the verses of slander [24:11ff] and accusation [24:4] were revealed together. However, this will only add a further problem to the last one, because it entails that there was need for two laws but only one was revealed.[1]

(4) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: One who says about a believer that which he has seen with his two eyes and heard with his two ears, then he is one of those whom God has described as: *Surely [as for] those who love that indecency should circulate respecting those who believe, they shall have a grievous chastisement in this world and the hereafter* (24:19).[2]

Author's comment: Al-Qummī has also narrated this in his *Tafsīr*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Hishām, from the Imam. Al-Ṣadūq has also narrated it in *al-Amālī*, via his chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Ḥumrān, from the Imam. Mufīd has also narrated it from the Imam in *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ*, via an incomplete chain of transmission (*mursal*).

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq narrated from the Messenger of God: One who discloses an indecency is like its perpetrator.[3]

(6) Concerning verse 24:22 (*And let not those of you who possess grace and abundance swear…*) it is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, ʿĀʾishah and Ibn Zayd,: It was revealed about Abū Bakr and Misṭaḥ b. Athāthah, who was Abū Bakr's cousin and one of the Muhājirīn (Meccan immigrants), as well as a Badr veteran. He was poor and Abū Bakr used to help him out and cover his expenses. When he plunged in the slander, Abu Bakr cut his payments and swore that he would never help him out. But when this verse was revealed, Abū Bakr

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24:11 starts without any conjunction or transition. (Trans.)

1 In other words, assuming that the accusers of the Prophet's wives should be meted out twice the penalty, then God should have revealed two laws: one for accusation of ordinary people, and one for accusation of the Prophet's wives. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Kāfi*, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of some of his companions.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Isḥāq b. ʿAmmār.

resumed his previous custom and said, "By God, I love God to forgive me! By God I shall never withdraw my help from him."[1]

(7) It is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās and others: This verse [24:22] was revealed about a group of Companions [of the Prophet] who pledged not to provide any financial help and donation to anyone who had spoken anything of the slander.[2]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has also narrated this, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Mardawayh, from Ibn ʿAbbās.

(8) Imam al-Bāqir explained the verse [24:22] as follows: "*And let not those of you who possess grace and abundance swear against giving to the near of kin*": these are the kindred of God's Messenger; "*and the poor and those who have fled in Allah's way, and they should pardon and overlook*": that is, you should pardon each other and should overlook one another. God says: "*Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful*" (24:22).[3]

(9) Imam al-Bāqir said (as part of a longer hadith): The following verses were revealed in Medina: *And those who accuse chaste women and then do not bring four witnesses, flog them, (giving) eighty stripes, and do not admit any testimony from them ever; and those are the transgressors. Except those who repent after that and make amends, for surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful* (24:4-5). According to these verses, God has refrained from describing such individuals by *īmān* (belief, faith) as long as they cling to their accusation, because He says: *Is he then who is a believer like him who is a transgressor? They are not equal* (32:18). Instead, He has described them as the friends of Iblīs (Satan), as He says: *He [Iblīs] was of the jinn, so he transgressed the commandment of his Lord* (18:50). Such people are cursed by God, as He says: *Surely those who accuse chaste believing women, unaware (of the evil), are cursed in this world and the hereafter, and they shall have a grievous chastisement. On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them as to what they did* (24:23-24). The witnessing of organs does not pertain to believers, but it pertains to those who are destined for punishment [because of their disbelief and misdeeds]. As with the believers, they will be given their book in the right hand, as God says: *Then whoever is given his book in his right hand, these shall read*

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

their book; and they shall not be dealt with a whit unjustly (17:71).[1]

(10) Concerning verse 24:26 (*Vile women are for vile men and vile men are for vile women. Good women are for good men and good men are for good women…*) *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says: There are a few interpretations proposed for this verse… The third meaning is: "The vile among women belong to the vile among men, and the vile among men belong to the vile among women." This is narrated from Abū Muslim and al-Jubbāʾī. It is also narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq, where they said: It is similar to the verse: *The adulterer shall not marry any but an adulteress or idolatress* (24:3). Some people [among the Prophet's Companions] decided to marry some of these women [that is, adulteresses] and thus God forbid them from doing so and did not like it for them.[2]

(11) The Messenger of God said: When the heart of a person is good and pure, then his body is also good and pure. When the heart of a person is vile and defiled, then his body is also vile and defiled.[3]

(12) Part of Imam al-Ḥasan b. ᶜAlīʾs argument against Muᶜāwiyah and his companions when they had insulted ᶜAlī was: "*Vile women are for vile men and vile men are for vile women*: By God, these are you and your companions, O Muᶜāwiyah. *Good women are for good men and good men are for good women*: These are ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, his companions and his followers (*shīᶜah*)."[4]

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Sālim.

2 Thus verse 24:26 was revealed to reinforce and emphasize verse 24:3. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Khiṣāl*, on the authority of ᶜAbd-Allāh b. ᶜUmar and Abu Hurayrah.

4 *Al-Iḥtijāj*.

Verses 27-34

These verses discuss certain laws and rulings that relate to the previous verses.

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يا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتاً غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْنِسُوا وَ تُسَلِّمُوا عَلى أَهْلِها ذلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(24:27) ***O you who believe! Do not enter houses other than your own houses until you have asked permission*** **(tastaʾnisū, from istīnās)** ***and saluted their inmates; this is better for you, that you may be mindful.***

Having *uns* with or toward something means having a peaceful relationship and affinity with it. *Istīnās* [in the form *istifʿāl*] means "seeking" or "asking for" such a condition and relationship. It is done practically by mentioning God's name or doing *tanaḥnuḥ* (coughing, clearing the throat, hemming, making a sound like "hem" or "ahem") in order to make the host realize one's presence and willingness to enter the house. This is a way of informing the owner to prepare for the entrant's presence, because he might be in a condition that he does not want other to see him or find him in that state.

Therefore, the wisdom behind this law is to cover the private affairs of the people and respect the honor of the believers. When one asks permission and informs the owner before entering a house, and then salutes the owner afterwards, he is helping the owner to cover his private affairs and is assuring the owner about himself [that he has no ill will and is not intending any harm].

Persistence with this good custom leads to the strengthening of a general sense of brotherhood, friendship and mutual support to reveal the fair and conceal the foul. This is referred to by saying: *this is better for you, that you may be mindful* (24:27). It means: May it be that by consistent practice of this custom you would be mindful of what you should observe and revive—in terms of the brotherhood and bond of the hearts, for that is where all social happiness lies.

One exegete has said: "*that you may be mindful*" is a justification and explanation for something omitted. The implied meaning is: "You are given

these instructions so that you may be mindful of God's admonitions and learn their reasons." This is an acceptable interpretation.

Another exegete has said: There is a shift of order in "*until you have asked permission and saluted their inmates*." What is meant is: "until you have saluted their inmates and asked permission." However, the implausibility of this view is clear.[1]

فَإِنْ لَمْ تَجِدُوا فِيها أَحَداً فَلا تَدْخُلُوها حَتَّى يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ وَ إِنْ قِيلَ لَكُمُ ارْجِعُوا فَارْجِعُوا هُوَ أَزْكى لَكُمْ وَ اللَّهُ بِما تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

(24:28) ***But if you do not find any one therein, then do not enter them until permission is given to you; and if it is said to you: "Go back", then go back; this is purer for you; and Allah is Knower of what you do.***

If you realize that there is no one there—that is, no one there to give permission—then do not enter the house because you do not have the owner's permission. The verse does not mean that you should peek into the house and check, and then if you do not find anyone there then you should not enter. The context shows that all of these laws and prohibitions are in fact against looking at and learning about the people's private affairs.

The first part of this verse describes the rule for entering someone else's house when there is no one there to give permission. The previous verse described the rule of entering while the owner of permission is there and does not deny [the entrant form entering]. As with the case when the owner of permission is there but does not give permission for the guest to enter, its rule is described by the second part of this verse: *and if it is said to you: Go back, then go back; this is purer for you; and Allah is Knower of what you do* (24:28).

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُناحٌ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتاً غَيْرَ مَسْكُونَةٍ فِيها مَتاعٌ لَكُمْ وَ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ ما تُبْدُونَ وَ ما تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

1 The reason for the shift of order is that salutation (that is, saying salaam) in this verse is a means of asking permission (*istīnās*), which occurs *before* one enters a place. This is different from the salaam that one says *after* entry. The implausibility of this view is because "*and saluted their inmates*" interprets and describes "*until you have asked permission*" by showing *how* one should ask permission. (Trans.)

(24:29) *There will be no sin upon you if you enter uninhabited houses wherein* (fīhā) *you have some goods* (matāᶜ) *belonging to you; and Allah knows what you do openly and what you hide.*

"*Wherein you have*" is not joined with a conjunction [like "and" or "or"] to the previous part. This, given the context of the verse, shows that "houses" is a noun with two adjectives: "*uninhabited*" and "*wherein you have some goods belonging to you*." Another possibility, albeit less likely, is that "*wherein you have some goods belonging to you*" explains and justifies why "*there will be no sin upon you*."[1] Also, the word *matāᶜ* in this verse apparently means *istimtāᶜ* (enjoyment, usufruct, utility).[2]

The verse gives permission to enter non-residential buildings that are meant for various purposes and functions, such as rest areas, bathhouses, and mills. The fact that they are built to meet [public] needs suggests a universal permission for entering them.

Some exegetes have said: *Matāᶜ* is meant as a noun [that is, "merchandise, commodity"; as opposed to *istimtāᶜ* which is a verbal noun, implying a verbal meaning]. It means that if you have some merchandise or commodity in places like markets or shops which are meant for sale and trade, then you can enter. The verse is giving universal permission for entering in such cases.

The above interpretation is only remotely compatible with the wording of the verse.

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصارِهِمْ وَ يَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذلِكَ أَزْكى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِما يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(24:30) *Say to the believing men that they cast down* (yaghuḍḍū, from ghaḍḍ) *their eyes* (min abṣārihim) *and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do.*

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1 This has rather to do with the Arabic text of the verse, where the subsequence part—"*wherein you have some goods belonging to you*"—is disjointed from the first part. The meaning favored by the author springs first to the mind. It is also more comprehensive than the second, because it effectively means that the lawfulness of entering such places without asking permission is *because* of two conditions: (1) they are uninhabited; and (2) you have some right or belonging there. (Trans.)

2 In other words, *matāᶜ* in this verse does not mean an object or commodity in particular, but it means the right to enjoy or use something or some place. (Trans.)

Ghaḍḍ means "closing one's eyelids." *Abṣār* is the plural of *baṣar*, which means "eye." Therefore, the particle *min* [lit. "of" or "from"; not translated above] shows the starting point of closing and casting down. Unlike what some exegetes have suggested, it is not an extra particle; it does not indicate genus; and it is not partitive.[1] The meaning is: They should go about casting and curtailing of looks, starting from their own eyes.

Say to the believing men that they cast down their eyes…: The second part of this statement is an independent sentence, saying: "they cast down their eyes" or "they will cast down their eyes." However, it is mentioned as a complement of "say" [in the imperative]. This shows that "say" means "order, command." The meaning, including the implied omitted part, is: "Order the believers to cast down their eyes, because if you order them to cast down their eyes, then they will cast down their eyes." Hence, the verse's message is a *command* to cast down the eyes. Alternatively, you can say that it is a *prohibition* of looking at what one should not look at—including what is unlawful to see of all unrelated individuals, including both male and female, because it is an unconditional statement.

***… and guard their private parts* (furūjahum)…:** *Furūj* is the plural of *furjah* and *farj*, meaning "a split between two things." This term is used metaphorically in reference to the private organs. This is the meaning of *furūj* in the Qur'an's language, which is full of courtesy and decorum. Later on, due to frequent usage, this metaphorical polite meaning became like a primary meaning for the term, as al-Rāghib has explained. What is meant here is: And order them to guard their private parts.

Some exegetes have suggested that "*guard their private parts*" means guarding them from adultery and sodomy. However, since this phrase is added to "*cast down their eyes*," it means guarding the private parts from the looks of others. It is narrated from al-Ṣādiq: "Every verse in the Qur'an about guarding the private parts is a prohibition of adultery except this verse [24:30] which is a prohibition of unlawful look."

Based on this narration, we can qualify the first sentence by the second one. Thus, the verse is prohibiting the believers from looking at the private parts of others, and is commanding them to cover their own.[2]

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1 If the particle *min* is extra, then it means that dropping it from the verse would not affect its meaning. If it is for genus (*jins*), then it means: "Eyes or looks *in general* should be cast down." If it is for partition (*tabʿīḍ*), then it means: "*Some of* eyes or gazes should be curtailed and cast down." The last two meanings are more compatible with the interpretation of *baṣar* as "look or gaze." (Trans.)

2 The qualification is that "*cast down their eyes*" is not an *unconditional* prohibition,

The verse then refers to the wisdom and benefit in this law, and urges them to observe it, by saying: *that is purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do*.

وَ قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِناتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصارِهِنَّ وَ يَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَ لا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلاَّ ما ظَهَرَ مِنْها وَ لْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَ لا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلاَّ لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبائِهِنَّ أَوْ آباءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْناءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي أَخَواتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسائِهِنَّ أَوْ ما مَلَكَتْ أَيْمانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلى عَوْراتِ النِّساءِ وَ لا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ ما يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَ تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعاً أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

(24:31) ***And say to the believing women that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their headcoverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or dependent men not having need (of women), or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn to Allah all of you, O believers! So that you may be successful.***

The first part of the verse—"*And say to the believing women that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts*"—has the same meaning as the first part of the previous verse: *Say to the believing men that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts* (24:30). Thus, it is not permissible for women to look at unlawful scenes; they must cover their private parts from unrelated men and women.

… and do not display* (yubdīna, from ibdā') *their ornaments except what appears thereof…: The word *ibdā'* means *iẓhār* (to show, to disclose, to

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but it means to curtail and divert one's gaze from what is unlawful, namely the private organs of others. (Trans.)

display, to expose). Obviously, there is nothing impermissible in showing the actual jewelry like earrings and bracelets, but what is meant by "displaying ornaments" is the body parts that bear those ornaments; that is, the places where women wear jewelry.

God has made an exception for what appears of these parts. According to the narrations, "*what appears thereof*" includes the face, the hands, and the feet, as we shall see below [in our examination of narrations].

***… and let them wear their head-coverings* (bi-khumurihinna) *over their bosoms* (juyūbihinna)…:** *Khumur* is the plural of *khimār*, which is what a woman uses to cover her head, and which hangs over her breast. *Juyūb* is the plural of *jayb* (collar). Here, *jayb* means *ṣadr* (chest, breast, bosom). The meaning of this part is: They should let the two ends of their head covering to come down so that they would cover their bosoms with them.

… and not display their ornaments except to their husbands* (li-buʿūlatihinna) *or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women…: *Buʿūlah* [plural of *baʿl*] means "husbands." The other seven groups are their lawfully related men, through either blood or marriage. The grandfathers of their husbands would have the same rule as their fathers-in-law, and the grandsons of their husbands would have the same rule as their husbands' sons.

… or their women…: Qualifying "women" by the possessive pronoun "their" shows that "*their women*" means "Muslim women." Thus, it is not permissible for Muslim women to take off their covering before non-Muslim women. There are narrations to this effect from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt.

… or those whom their right hands possess…: The unconditional form of this phrase makes it inclusive of both male and female servants. This is also found in the narrations, as we shall present below, by God's will. Here is a case of using the particle *mā* (lit. "that, which, what") for intelligent beings [accordingly translated as "whom"].

… or dependent* (al-tābiʿīn) *men not having need* (al-irbah) *(of women)…: *Irbah* means *ḥājah* (need). Here, it means sexual need and desire that should be satisfied by marriage. The verse literally says: "or dependents not having need *min al-rijāl*," where *min al-rijāl* (of men, among men) describes and defines *al-tābiʿīn* (dependents).[1] *Al-tābiʿīn* in this verse refers

1 In other words, the particle min is descriptive (*bayāniyyah*), implying that *tābiʿīn* (dependents) can be replaced by *rijāl* (men). It is not partitive (*tabʿīḍiyyah*, implying that *tābiʿīn* is a subset of *rijāl*. (Trans.)

to mentally disabled individuals who are under the guardianship of others and have no sexual desire, as interpreted by the narrations.

… or the children **(al-ṭifl)** ***who have not attained knowledge*** **(lam yaẓharū, from ẓuhūr)** ***of*** **(ʿalā)** ***what is hidden of women…:*** The article *al-* (lit. "the") shows *istighrāq* (inclusion, comprehensiveness, coverage). *Ẓuhūr* here means "to overcome, to dominate." The meaning is: "All children who are not capable and potent over those affairs of women that are bad to be mentioned explicitly."[1] This is a way of referring to puberty, as suggested by the exegetes.

… and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known …: What is meant here is making a sound from ornaments like anklets, necklaces, earrings and bracelets.

… and turn **(tūbū, from tawbah)** ***to Allah all of you, O believers! So that you may be successful:*** Given the theme of the verses, what is meant by *tawbah* (repentance, return) here is turning to God by obeying His commands and refraining from His prohibitions. Overall, it means following His path.

وَ أَنْكِحُوا الْأَيامى مِنْكُمْ وَ الصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبادِكُمْ وَ إِمائِكُمْ إِنْ يَكُونُوا فُقَراءَ يُغْنِهِمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَ اللَّهُ واسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٢﴾

(24:32) ***And marry*** **(al-inkāḥ)** ***those among you who are single*** **(al-ayāmā)** ***and those who are fit*** **(al-ṣāliḥīn)** ***among your male slaves and your female slaves; if they are needy, Allah will make them free from want out of His grace; and Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing.***

The word *inkāḥ* means *tazwīj* (to give in marriage, to make someone marry). *Ayāmā* is the plural of *ayyim*, meaning "a single man or a single woman." The latter is also called *ayyimah* [in feminine form]. In this verse, the word *ṣāliḥīn* (lit. "righteous") means those who are fit for marriage, not those who are righteous in terms of deeds.

… if they are needy, Allah will make them free from want out of His

1 *Ẓuhūr* can also mean "to learn, to know." This is how most English translation (including the one above) have interpreted the word. According to this interpretation, the verse describes immature children as lacking sexual knowledge. According to the author's interpretation, it describes them as being sexually inactive and impotent. The author's interpretation is more consistent with other cases in the Qur'an when *ẓuhūr* is used with the particle *ʿalā* (on, over, above), as in the current verse. (Trans.)

grace…: This is a promise of wealth and abundance, which is then emphasized by: *and Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing*. Every being receives its *rizq* (sustenance, provision, livelihood) according to its capacity [to receive], based on the *mashiyyah* (will, decree) of God. God-willing, we shall present a discussion about the abundance of provision in our exposition of the verse: *And by the Lord of the heavens and the earth! It is most surely the truth, just as you do speak* (51:23).

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وَ لْيَسْتَعْفِفِ الَّذِينَ لا يَجِدُونَ نِكاحاً حَتَّى يُغْنِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَ الَّذِينَ يَبْتَغُونَ الْكِتابَ مِمَّا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمانُكُمْ فَكاتِبُوهُمْ إِنْ عَلِمْتُمْ فِيهِمْ خَيْراً وَ آتُوهُمْ مِنْ مالِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي آتاكُمْ وَ لا تُكْرِهُوا فَتَياتِكُمْ عَلَى الْبِغاءِ إِنْ أَرَدْنَ تَحَصُّناً لِتَبْتَغُوا عَرَضَ الْحَياةِ الدُّنْيا وَ مَنْ يُكْرِهْهُنَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِكْراهِهِنَّ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

(24:33) ***And let those who do not find*** **(the means of)** ***marriage keep chaste*** **(yastaʿfif, from istiʿfāf)** ***until Allah makes them free from want out of His grace. And (as for) those who ask for a writing from among those whom your right hands possess, give them the writing if you know any good in them, and give them of the wealth of Allah which He has given you; and do not compel your slave girls to prostitution, when they desire to keep chaste, in order to seek the frail good of this world's life; and whoever compels them, then surely after their compulsion Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.***

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Istiʿfāf and *taʿaffuf* are synonymous (abstinence, restraint, curtailment). "Not finding marriage" means not being able to afford the dowry and the expenses of having a wife. The verse addresses those who cannot marry, commanding them to guard themselves against adultery and be chaste until God makes them financially solvent out of His grace.

… And (as for) those who ask for a writing **(al-kitāb)** ***from among those whom your right hands possess, give them the writing if you know any good in them…:*** *Kitāb* here means *mukātabah* (contract of manumission). "Asking for *mukātabah*" is when a slave asks his owner to write a contract with which he would be freed in exchange for a payment [which he would earn by labor]. The verse orders the masters to accept this offer if they "*know any good in them*," which refers to verifying if they are fit and suitable to be freed.

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… and give them of the wealth of Allah which He has given you…: This refers to a legal ruling about obligatory *zakāh* (alms, poor-rate), where part of the *zakāh* fund should be allocated to paying the agreed amount of *mukātabah*. Thus, they have a share in *zakāh* money which belongs to them, as stated in the verse: *and the (ransoming of) captives* (9:60). This part of the verse could also be a moral advice, telling the owners to give some discount to the slaves on the agreed price.

This verse and the previous one involve several legal discussions that should be sought in books of *fiqh* (Islamic law, jurisprudence).

… and do not compel your slave girls* (fatayātikum) *to prostitution* (al-bighāʾ), *when they desire to keep chaste* (taḥaṣṣunan), *in order to seek the frail good* (ʿaraḍ) *of this world's life: *Fatayāt* means "slave women and slave girls." *Bighāʾ* means "adultery." It is in the form *mufāʿalah*, from the root *baghy* (transgression).[1] *Taḥassun* has two meanings: (1) *taʿaffuf* (keeping chaste, abstinence, restraint); and (2) *izdiwāj* (marriage). "Seeking the *ʿaraḍ* of this world" means seeking wealth.[2] The meaning is clear.

The verse prohibits forcing slave girls to prostitution, conditional on "*when they desire to keep chaste*." This qualification is because there would be no forcing or compulsion (*ikrāh*) if there is no such desire of chastity on their part. God then promises these ladies forgiveness if they are forced to do so by saying: *and whoever compels them, then surely after their compulsion Allah is Forgiving, Merciful*. The rest of the meaning should be clear.

وَ لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنا إِلَيْكُمْ آياتٍ مُبَيِّناتٍ وَ مَثَلاً مِنَ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ وَ مَوْعِظَةً لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(24:34) *And certainly We have sent to you clarifying communications and a description* (mathalan) *of those who have passed away before you, and an admonition to those who guard (against evil).*

Mathal here is synonymous with *ṣifah* (attribute, description). It could be that this verse is an independent message and expresses a new point. The meaning would be: I swear that We have sent to you the following: (1) communications that elucidate for you religious teachings by which you may reach salvation; (2) descriptions of those who were before you, both their

1 The form *mufāʿalah* is most commonly used when there are two sides in an action. Thus, *bighāʾ* literally means a "two-sided transgression," which is used courteously to denote adultery. (Trans.)

2 It is called *ʿaraḍ* because it does not last. (Trans.)

good-doers and their evildoers, so that it may become clear to you what you should take and what you should drop; and (3) admonition to those of you who are God-conscious.

The word "and" at the beginning of the verse could also mean "while." In that case, the verse would be a description of the subject in "*and turn to Allah all of you*" (24:31).[1]

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Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 24:27 (*Do not enter houses other than your own houses until you have asked permission* (tastaʾnisū, from istīnās) *and saluted their inmates*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Istīnās* is stamping your shoes [to make a sound] and saying salaam.[2]

Author's comment: Al-Ṣadūq has also narrated this in *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, with an unmentioned chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*) up to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, from the Imam.

(2) Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī said: Once we asked, "O Messenger of God, what is *istīnās*?" He said, "It is uttering God's glorification (*tasbīḥ*), praise (*taḥmīd*) or exaltation (*takbīr*), or doing *tanaḥnuḥ* (coughing, clearing the throat, hemming) as a signal to the people in a house.[3]

(3) Once, a man walked into one of the chambers of the Messenger of God while he was combing his hair. He [the Messenger of God] said to the man, "Had I known that you are looking, I would have struck it [the comb] in your eyes. [The law of] asking permission is exactly meant for [preventing this kind of] looking."[4]

(4) Once, a man asked the Prophet: "Should I ask permission to enter [even] from my mom?" He answered, "Yes." The man asked, "She has no servant other than me. Should I ask permission from her every time that I want to enter?" He replied, "Do you like to see her naked?" The man answered, "No!" He said, "So ask her permission."[5]

(5) Once a man coughed and cleared his throat (*tanaḥnuḥ*) as a means

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1 That is: "Turn and repent to God *while* We have sent to you clarifying communications…" This implies justification, and the word "while" would mean "because." (Trans.)

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī ʿAbd-Allāh.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Sahl b. Saʿd.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

of asking permission from the Messenger of God to enter. He said to a woman there named Rawḍah: "Go to this man and tell him to say, 'Peace be upon you, may I enter?'" The man heard this and said it. Then the Prophet said, "Come in!"[1]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has narrated the above narrations from several collections of hadith.[2]

(6) The Messenger of God was once asked about asking permission to enter the homes. He said: One who looks [inside a house] before asking permission and saluting [the inhabitants] has indeed disobeyed God and deserves no permission.[3]

(7) Concerning verse 24:28 (*But if you do not find any one therein, then do not enter them until permission is given to you*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means that if you do not find anyone there to give you permission [to enter], then do not enter until you are given permission.

(8) Concerning verse 24:29 (*There will be no sin upon you if you enter uninhabited houses wherein you have some goods belonging to you*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: This pertains to bathhouses, rest areas and mills. You can enter them without permission.[4]

(9) In a narration about what God has made incumbent upon different organs, Imam al-Ṣādiq said: He has prescribed for the eye to not look at what God has made unlawful for it, and to turn away from the unlawful scenes that God has prohibited. This is the eye's action, and it is part of *īmān* (faith, belief). He says: *Say to the believing men that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts* (24:30). Thus He has prohibited them from looking at the private parts of each other. One should not look at his brother's private part, and should guard his own from being seen. He also says: *And say to the believing women that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts* (24:31). Thus, a Muslim woman should not look at the private part of her sister, and should guard her own from being seen.

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has narrated hadith number 2 from Abū Ayyūb, and number 3 from Sahl b. Saʿd [just like the narrations in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*]. Number 5 is narrated from ʿAmr b. Saʿd al-Thaqafī.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ʿUbādat b. al-Ṣāmit.

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

The Imam then said: Every verse in the Qur'an about guarding the private parts is a prohibition of adultery except this verse [24:30] which is a prohibition of [unlawful] look.[1]

Author's comment: Qummī has also narrated the subsequent part of this hadith in his *Tafsīr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr, from the Imam. It is also narrated from Abū al-ʿĀliyah and Ibn Zayd.

(10) Imam al-Bāqir said: Once, a young man of Anṣār (Medinite Supporters) came across a woman in Medina, walking from the opposite side. That was a time when women used to wrap their head covers behind their ears. The man looked at her as they were facing each other. When she passed him, he continued to look behind to see her, and at the same time he entered an alley named after a certain tribe. As he was looking back, he went bang into a piece of bone or glass sticking out of a wall, and that tore his face. When the woman was out of his sight, he turned his head and saw the blood pouring on his clothes and chest. He thought to himself, "By God I shall go to the Messenger of God and inform him of this." Thus he set off. When the Messenger of God saw him, he asked, "What happened to you?" The man told him what happened. Then Gabriel came down with the verse: *Say to the believing men that they cast down* (yaghuḍḍū, from ghaḍḍ) *their eyes and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do* (24:30).[2]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has narrated a similar account, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

This narration suggests that *ghaḍḍ* (casting down), in this verse, apparently means not to look at unrelated women altogether [that is, closing the eye and not looking at all, as opposed to merely lowering and curtailing one's gaze while still looking]. The same can be deduced from some of the previous narrations that specifically prohibit looking at the private part of others.

(11) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked, "What parts of an unrelated woman are permissible to look at?" He said, "The face, the hands and the feet."[3]

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū ʿAmr al-Zubayrī.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Saʿd al-Iskāf.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Marwak b. ʿUbayd, on

Author's comment: This is also narrated in *al-Khiṣāl*, on the authority of some of our companions, from the Imam.

(12) ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar asked his brother Mūsā b. Jaʿfar: "What parts of an unrelated woman can a man look at?" He said, "The face, the hand, and the place of bracelet [that is, the wrist]."[1]

(13) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It is permissible to look at the heads of the people of Tihāmah [in the Arabian Peninsula], the desert Arabs, people of the outskirts, and infidels, because if they are told to stop they will not do so.[2]

He also said: As women who are insane or feeble-minded, it is permissible to look at their hair and body as long as one does not intentionally do so [that is, gaze at them, out of lust].[3]

Author's comment: Apparently what the Imam means by "as long as one does not intentionally do so" is the act of looking for sexual pleasure (*rībah*).[4]

(14) The Prophet said to the Commander of the Faithful: O ʿAlī! The first glance is for you [that is, permissible], but the second one is against you, not for you.[5]

(15) In another similar account, the Messenger of God said to ʿAlī: Do not make successive looks [at an unrelated woman], because the first one is yours but not the second.[6]

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the authority of some of our companions.

1 Al-Ḥimyarī's *Qurb al-isnād*.

2 The pronoun "they" in this hadith is masculine. It is based on taking these women to be a "people" (*ahl* or *qawm*, which are both masculine). (Author.) Thus the meaning is: "If these women are ordered to stop exposing their hair, they will not do so." Another meaning suggested by ʿAllāmah Majlisī is that the pronoun "they" refers to their men: "If their men are told to stop exposing their wives, they will not stop." Majlisī, *Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1404), 20:353-354. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbbād b. Ṣuhayb.

4 Deriving sexual pleasure in any form or degree—whether by sight, voice and touch—is only permissible from one's lawful spouse. *Rībah* literally means "doubt or suspicion." In Islamic law it specifically means "impious look," meaning a look that *could* involve sexual attraction and pleasure. It is called *rībah* because it involves a risk and possibility (*rībah*) of falling into sin, or because it may raise suspicion (*rībah*) about the looker in the minds of others. (Trans.)

5 *Al-Khiṣāl*.

6 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, from several collections of hadith, on the authority of Buraydah.

(16) Umm Salamah said: Once I and Maymūnah were with the Prophet, when Ibn Umm Maktūm came by, and that was after he had ordered us to maintain a veil [33:53]. He told us: "Veil yourselves." We asked, "O Messenger of God! Is it not that he is blind and does not see us?" He said, "But are *you* also blind? Is it not that *you* see him?"[1]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has also narrated this on the authority of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī and al-Bayhaqī, from her.

(17) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It is not permissible for a [Muslim] woman to uncover in front of a Jewish or Christian woman, because they might describe it to their husbands.[2]

(18) Concerning "*those whom their right hands possess*" (24:31), *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: This has been interpreted as male and female servants, as narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

(19) ʿAbd al-Rāḥmān b. Abī ʿAbd-Allāh says: I asked him [Imam al-Ṣādiq] about "*dependent men not having need*" (24:31). He said: These are mentally disabled individuals who are under the guardianship of others and who do not sleep with women [that is, do not have its ability and/or its desire].[3]

(20) The Messenger of God said: If one refrains from marriage because of fearing poverty, then he is pessimistic of God, for God has promised: *If they are needy, Allah will make them free from want out of His grace* (24:32).[4]

Author's comment: There are abundant narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt confirming the ones quoted above. Those who are interested should refer to the books of hadith.

(21) Concerning "*give them the writing if you know any good in them*" (24:33) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "Good" means: (1) testifying that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is God's Messenger; and (2) currently having a job as a source of earning, or having some skill [by which he can make a living].[5]

Author's comment: There are also other narrations to this effect.

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1 *Jawāmiʿ al-jāmiʿ*.

2 *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, on the authority of Ḥafṣ b. al-Bakhtarī.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar, from his father, from his fathers.

5 *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, on the authority of al-ʿAlāʾ, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim.

(22) ʿAlāʾ b. al-Fuḍayl says: Concerning "*give them the writing if you know any good in them, and give them of the wealth of Allah which He has given you*" (24:33), Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "[It means that] you reduce some of their instalments that you were not planning to discount before, albeit within your ability." I asked, "Like how much?" He said, "[My father] Abū Jaʿfar had a slave who owed him 6000; he gave the slave a discount of 1000."[1]

(23) It is narrated in from ʿAlī that it [the discount] should be a quarter [of the agreed price].[2]

Author's comment: The narrations overall suggest that apparently no specific percentage has been set for this.

(24) Under the exposition of verse 9:60 (*and the (ransoming of) captives*) we reported al-ʿAyyāshi's narration that the *mukātab* (slaves who are written off their contracts of manumission) are entitled to the part of *zakāh* (alms, poor-rate) that is allotted to the freeing of captives.

(25) Concerning verse 24:33 (*and do not compel your slave girls to prostitution, when they desire to keep chaste*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: The Arabs and Quraysh used to purchase slave girls, impose heavy duties on them to pay, and order them, "Go, prostitute, and earn money!" Thus God prohibited them from doing so by saying: *and do not compel your slave girls to prostitution… Allah is Forgiving, Merciful* (24:33). The verse means that God will not hold these slaves accountable for this if they are forced into it.

(26) Concerning verse 24:33 (*in order to seek the frail good of this world's life*) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: It has been said that ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy had six slave girls whom he had compelled to make earnings by prostitution. When it was revealed that adultery is unlawful, they went to the Messenger of God and complained [about their case]. Thus this verse was revealed.

Author's comment: There are also some narrations reported in *al-Durr al-manthūr* which state that ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy had slave girls whom he had compelled to prostitution. However, the part about the prohibition of adultery [as being the cause of revelation of this verse] is weakened by the fact that adultery was not prohibited in Medina [where this chapter was revealed and ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ubayy used to live], but it was prohibited

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān* and *al-Durr al-manthūr*.

in Mecca before the migration [of the Prophet to Medina]. Rather, the unlawfulness of adultery was one of the necessary and undoubtable laws of Islam since its call of truth first appeared. As we said in our exposition of Sūrah al-Anʿām [under verse 6:151], the unlawfulness of indecencies (*al-fawāḥish*)—one of which is adultery—is among the universal laws that are not restricted to any particular religious legal code.

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Verses 35-46

These verses present a distinction between true believers and disbelievers. The believers are led by their righteous deeds to a light from their Lord, which results in their knowledge of God, and leads them to the best of rewards and graces from God on the day when veils will be lifted from their hearts and eyes. The disbelievers, on the contrary, have actions that only lead them to a mirage that has no reality. They are in layers of darkness, one above another. God has not given them light, and thus they have no light.

God explains this distinction by talking about two kinds of light that He has. He has a universal light with which the heavens and the earth are lit. It is with His light that all things appear in the realm of existence, without which they would have been invisible [that is, non-existent]. Evidently, if something (call it A) were to make another thing (call it B) to appear and manifest, then A must itself be apparent and manifest to begin with. This is exactly the definition of "light": it is something that is manifest itself, and also brings other things to manifestation. Hence, God is a "Light," because through His illumination the heavens and the earth [that is, the entire world of creation] appear and come to manifestation. In this sense, the divine light is like physical light, which makes dark objects visible to the senses by shining upon them. The difference is that in the case of divine light, making things appear is the same as making them *exist*; but in the case of physical light, the manifestation of dark objects is not the same as their existence [that is, they exist nonetheless, whether they are shined upon or not].

Besides His universal light, God also has a special light that benefits the believers in particular. They attain this light through their righteous deeds. This is the light of *maʿrifah* (gnosis, knowledge of God) that illuminates their hearts and eyes on a day when "*the hearts and the eyes shall turn about*" (24:37). This light will lead them to eternal bliss and felicity, and with this light they will witness, with the eye of insight, what was hidden from them in this world. God has compared this light to a lamp that is in a glass in a niche, kindled by an oil that is at the utmost degree of clarity. The glass also shines as if it were a glittering star, adding light upon light. This lamp is placed in houses of worship, where God is glorified by certain men among the believers who are not distracted from the remembrance of their Lord and His service by any trade or sale.

Thus is the description of the light of divine knowledge, with which

God honors the believers, and which leads to eternal salvation. He has forbidden this light to the disbelievers and leaves them in layers of darkness where they cannot see [the truth]. God exclusively bestows such light from Himself upon one who engages in His service and turns away from the frail and passing goods of worldly life. Indeed, God does as He wills; to Him belongs the sovereignty [over the entire world of existence], and toward Him is the end of all affairs [24:42]. He rules as He wants; He sends down rain and hail from the same cloud [24:43]; He turns over the night and the day [24:44]; and He makes some animals walk on their belly, some on two feet, and some on four, while He has created them all from water [24:45].

These verses are not altogether disconnected from the previous verses. The previous verses about the legal rulings and injunctions ended by saying: *And certainly We have sent to you clarifying communications and a description of those who have passed away before you, and an admonition to those who guard (against evil)* (24:34). His revelation of "clarifying communications" mean that He expresses divine teachings and realities for His servants, which is equivalent to His illumination (*tanwīr*).

Moreover, the above "communications" (*āyāt*) compose of the Qur'an, and God has referred to the Qur'an as "light" in a few places in His Book, such as: *And We have sent to you clear light* (4:174).

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكاةٍ فِيها مِصْباحٌ الْمِصْباحُ فِي زُجاجَةٍ الزُّجاجَةُ كَأَنَّها كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَ لا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكادُ زَيْتُها يُضِيءُ وَ لَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نارٌ نُورٌ عَلى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشاءُ وَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

(24:35) ***Allah is the light*** **(nūr)** ***of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His light is as a niche*** **(ka-mishkāh)** ***in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, (and) the glass is as it were a brightly shining*** **(durriyy)** ***star, lit*** **(yūqadu, from īqād)** ***from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof*** **(zaytuhā)** ***almost gives light though fire touch it not—light upon light—Allah guides to His light whom He will, and Allah sets forth parables for the people, and Allah is Knower of all things.***

As al-Rāghib and others have said, *mishkāh* (niche) is an enclosed hole

or opening that is made in a wall to place certain articles in it, like lamps and other things. Thus, it is different from *fānūs* (lantern, portable lamp). A *durrī* star is a large star that has a lot of light. There are only a few of them in the sky. *Īqād* means *ishtiʿāl* (to enkindle, to inflame, to ignite), and *zayt* means "olive oil."

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth…: Light (*nūr*) is well-known. It is that by which dark objects become visible to our eyes. Thus, things become visible by the light, while light is visible by itself. Light is that which is manifest by virtue of its essence, and a cause of manifestation of other things to the eye; this is the primary meaning assigned to the word "light." Later, this meaning was generalized to any means of observing and detecting sensible things, as either a metaphorical meaning or a secondary real meaning for the term. Thus, every sense counts as "light" or "luminous" because it is a means of bringing its objects of perception to manifestation. This includes hearing, smell, taste and touch [besides sight as a primary or literal meaning].

Then the meaning was further generalized to beyond the senses. Thus, *ʿaql* (intellect, reason) has also been counted as light, because it manifests intellectual realities. All these usages and generalizations are based on analyzing the meaning of physical light as something that is manifest itself, and brings other things to manifestation.

Likewise, the existence of anything is that which manifests the thing to other things. Hence, existence is the perfect example of light. Meanwhile, contingent beings exist by God's existentiation (*ījād*) of them [that is, they exist by His bestowal of existence upon them]. Therefore, He is the most perfect instance of light. In other words, there is an existence, or "light," which characterizes the existents [other than God], and that is the existence and light which they have got and borrowed temporarily from God. Then, there is an existence, or "light," which stands *independently*,[1] and which existentiates and illuminates other things. It is in this sense that God is the independent light which manifests the heavens and the earth. This is the meaning of "Allah *is the light of the heavens and the earth*," because light is attributed to the heavens and earth, then predicated on *Allah*. This is how we should understand those who have said, "It means that God is the illuminator (*munawwir*) of the heavens and earth." Their point is that "light," in this verse, should not be interpreted as the borrowed and metaphorical light, which itself depends on the heavens and the earth. That is not the

1 The distinction between "independent" and "borrowed" light is of crucial importance here. (Trans.)

light—meaning existence—that predicates God; He is exalted far above that.

This interpretation shows that God is not unknown to any being in the universe, because the appearance and manifestation of everything, for itself and for others, is only through God's manifestation. This means that before realizing the manifestation and appearance of oneself, one would realize God's essential and intrinsic manifestation and appearance [just as in the case of physical sight and light]. This is referred to a few verses later: *Do you not see that Allah is glorified by everyone in the heavens and the earth, and the (very) birds with expanded wings? Each knows its prayer and glorification* (24:41). Glorifying, praying, and having knowledge of one's own glorification and prayer is pointless if one is ignorant of Whom he glorifies and prays to. This is similar to the verse: *And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification* (17:44). God-willing, we shall fully discuss this below.

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth…: Given the above explanations, "light" in this expression means a universal light of God which illuminates and gives light to everything. This is equivalent to the existence of every being, and its *ẓuhūr* (manifestation, appearance) to itself and to other beings. This is God's universal mercy.

***… the likeness of His light* (nūrihi)…:** Here, God describes His light. Apparently, *nūrihi* (His light) is a possessive ascription, meaning "the light that belongs to God." It is not a description of God as the light, but it is a description of a light that is His, and which He shines and bestows upon others. However, this analogy is not for the universal borrowed and bestowed light that manifests everything, meaning the existence that everything receives, because at the end of the analogy it says: Allah *guides to His light whom He will* (24:35). Had the analogy been for God's universal light, then it would not be restricted to a certain group. Rather, it can be inferred from the verse that this is a description of God's special light for the true believers.[1]

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1 Therefore, "*Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth*" means that God is the source of existence for all beings, while "*His light*" in the subsequent part of the verse refers to His guidance of the believers in particular. Both interpretations are based on the text, tone and context of the verse. This might suggest an inconsistency in the verse because it switches from one sense of light to another. However, it should be noted that God's light has a single general and comprehensive meaning, which then manifests in different particular instances and specific aspects. In other words, both His light of existence and His light of guidance are available to all beings and humans, except that each absorbs and benefits from it according to its capacity. Both of them are universal from

God has attributed light to Himself in other places in His Book, as He says: *They desire to put out the light of* Allah *with their mouths but Allah will perfect His light* (61:8), *Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people, like him whose likeness is that of one in utter darkness whence he cannot come forth?* (6:122), *He will give you two portions of His mercy, and make for you a light with which you will walk* (57:28), and: *What! Is he whose heart Allah has opened for Islam so that he is in a light from his Lord (like the hard-hearted)?* (39:22). This is the light of *īmān* (faith, belief) and *maʿrifah* (gnosis, divine knowledge). It is the light that God gives to His believing servants, which illuminates their path toward Him.

Light, in this verse, does not mean the Qur'an, contrary to what some exegetes have said, because the verse describes the state of *all* believers, including those who were before and after the revelation of the Qur'an. Moreover, this light is described as an attribute and quality of the believers which they carry, as is alluded to in these verses: *They [the believers] shall have their reward and their light* (57:19), and: *They [the believers] shall say: Our Lord! Make perfect for us our light* (66:8). The Qur'an, on the other hand, is not an attribute or quality for the believers, unless it is called "*their* light," in the sense that it unveils certain truths and teachings for them. In that case, "light" would again boil down to our earlier interpretation [that is, light of faith and gnosis].

… as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass…: God's light is compared to the entire image which is depicted by the rest of the verse: *a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass…* It is not compared only the niche, because that would ruin the meaning. Such expressions [where a series of components add to a picture] are very common in Qur'an's analogies.

…(and) the glass is as it were a brightly shining star…: The glass is like a bright shining star, in the sense that it intensifies the light that shines from the lamp. The placement of glass around the lamp makes the flames of the lamp steadier, because it is no longer disturbed by turbulence in its surrounding air, such as the flow of wind. Thus, the lamp is like a brightly shining star, indicating its glow and the stability of its illumination.

… lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not…: This is a second predicate for the lamp. It means: "The lamp is ablaze, and its blaze is from a blessed

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His point of view, but they are particularized by the receptivity of receivers. (Trans.)

olive tree," meaning that the lamp is kindled by the *olive oil* that is extracted from such a tree [where "oil" is implied]. Not being either eastern or western, means that the tree is positioned on neither the west side nor the east side [of a hill], such that it would only receive light for half of the day and be under shadow in the other half. That would prevent its fruit from fully growing, and as a result, its oil would not be pure. Thus it would not provide bright, suitable and steady light. This tree, however, receives sunlight for the whole day. That is why its fruit ripens fully, and the oil extracted from it will be perfect.

The proof for the above interpretation is in the following part of the verse: *the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not*. Given the context, this description apparently refers to the purity of the oil and its perfect capacity for burning. This quality of the oil is a result of the tree being "*neither eastern, nor western*."

Some exegetes have said: "*neither eastern nor western*" means that this is not a worldly tree, because otherwise it would have grown either in the east or in the west. Others have said: It means that the tree is not in the eastern side of the inhabited part of the earth, nor is it in its western side, but it is in Syria—which is between east and west, where the olive trees give the best oils. However, neither of these interpretations can be inferred from the theme and context of the verse.

… light upon light…: This is a predicate for an omitted subject, and that is "the light of the lamp," which is understood from the context. The meaning is: "The light of the lamp is a great light upon another great light." In other words, its light is at the utmost degree of brightness.

It has been said that "*light upon light*" does not imply multiplicity of light, but it implies its intensity and strength. In other words, it is not about a certain light being above another certain light that is similar to it, or that it is the sum of two lights; rather, it is a light that has been intensified and amplified without a limit. This is a common expression in speeches.

The above meaning is quite plausible. Another subtle and elegant interpretation is that the expression could be referring to multiple lights, in the sense that the light primarily, and in reality, belongs to the lamp, but it can also be attributed to the glass, secondarily and metaphorically. Thus, there will be two lights based on the two ascriptions, even though in reality the light is only that of the lamp. The glass is devoid of light itself, but it has a light that is different from the lamp's light according to how the light is attributed. The glass's light depends on, and draws from, the lamp's light. The same two perspectives apply to what is being compared: the light of faith and gnosis, which illuminates the hearts of the believers, is a borrowed

light that is taken from God's light. Their light depends on, and draws from, God's light.

In short, what is being compared is God's light, which shines upon the hearts of the believers. It is compared to a light that shines from a glass, which is placed on a lamp in a niche that is fueled by a pure and virgin olive oil. The light of this lamp—which glows from the glass and the niche—is focused and directed at its seekers, and is at the highest degree of strength and excellence.

Therefore, the verse's imagery can be explained as follows: (1) The niche indicates the focus and concentration of the light. It is centered in the niche, and then illuminates the entire house. (2) The oil being from an olive tree that is neither eastern nor western signifies the purity and excellence of its oil. This has a direct impact on the clarity of the light that is produced from it. (3) "*The oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not*": This expression indicates the excellence of the light. (4) Finally, saying, "*light upon light*" signifies the strength and intensity of the light, or the fact that the glass owes its light to the lamp.

… Allah guides to His light whom He will…: This is an additional statement which explains and justifies why only the believers benefit from the light of faith and gnosis, while the disbelievers are deprived of it. It is understood from the theme of the verses that "*whom He will*" are those who are described in a later verse: *Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of* Allah… (24:37). Therefore, "*whom He will*" are believers who are perfect in their quality of faith.

The meaning is: "It is God's will to guide to His light only those who are characterized by perfect belief," not those who have chosen disbelief, both of whom are described later. Thus, His will takes into account the qualities and characteristics of the individuals. It does not mean that God guides a certain group of people and not others simply because He pleases to do so. In that case, one should justify the meaning by adding that He pleases to guide someone only if the person proves to have the capacity for receiving guidance, by having a good character and practice, which is something that is found only in the believers, not in the disbelievers. However, there is no need for this interpretation and addition.

The proof for our interpretation above is in what He says in a later verse: "*And to* Allah *belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth…*" (24:42), as we shall discuss by God's will.

… and Allah sets forth parables for the people, and* Allah *is Knower of all things: This implies that there are secrets of knowledge and deep realities which underlie the above analogy. This kind of transcendent knowledge

is expressed through a parable because this way the realities and subtleties can be available to both the learned and the unlearned; each person would take their share from it [according to their capacity]. He says: *And (as for) these examples, We set them forth for the people, and none fully understand them but the learned* (29:43).

فِي بُيُوتٍ أَذِنَ اللَّهُ أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَ يُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيها بِالْغُدُوِّ وَ الْآصالِ ﴿٣٦﴾

(24:36) *In houses which Allah has permitted* (adhina, from idhn) *to be raised up and that His name may be remembered in them; glorify Him therein in the mornings and the evenings.*

To give *idhn* (permission) for some act means "declaring that there is no problem in doing it." "To be raised" (*rafʿ*) in this verse means the elevation of status, which is equivalent to honor and high regard. Since all elevation and honor belongs to God alone, it follows that: (1) no one else has any elevation or honor except inasmuch as He grants them; and (2) the elevation and honor of others trace back to His elevation and honor. Hence, His permission for these houses to be elevated is because of their connection to Him.

Based on the above discussion, it should be clear that the cause of elevation of these houses is their description that is mentioned next: *and that His name may be remembered in them*. Given the theme and context of the verse, it means that God is continually remembered in these houses, or at least there is always a capacity for His remembrance in these houses. Thus we can paraphrase the meaning as follows: He has permitted that His name may be remembered in these houses, and this raises the value and status of these houses.

In houses which…: This follows the previous verse in either of two ways: (1) "*the likeness of His light is as a niche… In houses which*"; or (2) "*Allah guides to His light… In houses which*." Either way, the end meaning would be the same. Mosques would be an example of these houses, because they are exactly places for the remembrance of God and are built for this cause. He says: *and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered* (22:40).

… glorify* (yusabbaḥu, from tasbīḥ) *Him therein in the mornings* (bil-ghuduww) *and the evenings,* (al-āṣāl)*: God's *tasbīḥ* (glorification, celebration, declaration of purity and clearness) means "believing and stating that He is free from anything that does not befit His sanctity." *Ghuduww* is the plural of *ghadāh*, which means "morning," and *āṣāl* is the plural of *aṣīl*, which means "late afternoon" (*aṣr*).

Ilhāʾ means "diversion from what is important, distraction from what matters." According to al-Rāghib, *tijārah* (trade, merchandise, business) is "to make business with some capital and asset in order to make a profit." He also says that *tijārah* is the only root in Arabic where letter *jīm* follows letter *tāʾ*. Again, according to him, *bayʿ* (sale) means "giving a commodity in exchange for its price." He says that *qalb* [as a verbal noun (*maṣdar*)] means "turning something from one side to another." Then, *taqlīb* is an exaggerated form of this, and *taqallub* is "to accept and undergo such turning around." Therefore, *taqallub* of the hearts and eyes means their transition from one state of understanding to another.

… glorify Him therein in the mornings and the evenings: This is a quality of the "houses." It could also be a new and independent statement that elaborates and interprets: *that His name may be remembered in them* (24:36). Glorifying God "in the mornings and the evenings" is a way of saying that they always glorify Him, not that they only glorify in these two times and not in the other times.

The verse only talks about God's *tasbīḥ* (glorification, declaration of purity) but not His *taḥmīd* (praise, declaration of excellence). The reason is that He is known with all His qualities of perfection and there is no veil that covers Him. He is Light, and light is that which is manifest itself, and manifests other things. Therefore, in order to reach pure gnosis [of God], one only has to negate what does not befit Him and establish His clearness from defects, which is called *tasbīḥ*. Once that is achieved, nothing remains but Him, and that is the perfection of *maʿrifah* (gnosis, knowledge of God). That is when one would praise God [that is, only after establishing His clearness from defect and limitation]. Overall, describing God by qualities of perfection should be done after one acquires *maʿrifah*, as He says: *Glory be to Allah (for freedom) from what they describe; But not so the servants of Allah, the purified ones* (37:159-160). These verses say that God is exalted above the descriptions of the people, except the descriptions of those servants whom He has chosen and purified for Himself. We already had a discussion about the meaning of God's praise (*ḥamd*) in Chapter 1.

In other words, God's praise (*ḥamd*, *taḥmīd*) is to describe and proclaim His qualities of perfection, and this is associated with realizing the light of His knowledge (*maʿrifah*). God's glorification (*tasbīḥ*), on the other hand, is to declare His clearness and exaltation above anything that does not befit Him, and this is preliminary to His praise. These verses only mention the preliminary because the subject is those qualities of the believers that prepare them for guidance to God's light. The reader should reflect on this.

رِجالٌ لا تُلْهِيهِمْ تِجارَةٌ وَ لا بَيْعٌ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَ إِقامِ الصَّلاةِ وَ إِيتاءِ الزَّكاةِ يَخافُونَ يَوْماً تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ الْقُلُوبُ وَ الْأَبْصارُ ﴿٣٧﴾

(24:37) *Men whom neither merchandise* (tijārah) *nor selling* (bayʿ) *diverts* (tulhīhim, from ilhāʾ) *from the remembrance of Allah and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of poor-rate; they fear a day in which the hearts and the eyes shall turn about* (tataqallabu, from taqallub).

In everyday language, when *tijārah* (merchandise, trade) is used in contradistinction with *bayʿ* (sale), it means an occupation that involves continuous transactions of purchase and sale, as opposed to *bayʿ*, which is a one-time transaction [not an a career or occupation]. Therefore, the difference between them is that one of them is continuous and the other one is not. Negating *tijārah* would already include the negation of *bayʿ*,[1] but restating *bayʿ* implies that they are never heedless of their Lord: neither continuously distracted due to their business and occupation, nor occasionally. In other words, neither their continuous business nor any specific transaction that they do within their business life makes them forget their Lord.

Some exegetes have suggested an acceptable explanation: The financial gain and benefit involved in *bayʿ* [that is, a specific sale and transaction that is about to occur] is more certain, real and liquid, as opposed to *tijārah* as a whole occupation [which involves only speculative benefits]. If one is not distracted by *tijārah*, it does not necessarily follow that he will not be distracted by *bayʿ* either. That is why the verse negates *bayʿ* separately, in addition to negating *tijārah*, and the explicit repetition of the negative particle *lā* (nor, no) indicates and emphasizes this negation.

… from the remembrance of Allah and the keeping up* (iqām) *of prayer and the giving of poor-rate…: *Iqām* is the same as *iqāmah* (keeping up, establishing, raising), where the end letter *tāʾ* [also recorded as *haʾ*] is truncated [to simplify the speech].

Stating "the prayer" and "the poor-rate" is a way of referring to all good deeds that God has made obligatory upon His servants to do during their life in this world. "Keeping up of prayer" represents the fulfilment of all obligations of a servant toward God, while "giving of poor-rate" represents all obligations that one has toward the people. These two deeds are mentioned

1 This implication is because negating *tijārah* means that they are *never* heedless of their Lord. (Trans.)

in particular because each of them is a major act in its category [that is, in the two categories of "God-related" and "people-related" acts of worship].

Now, prayer and almsgiving are also forms of God's remembrance; especially prayer. Therefore, mentioning "the remembrance of God" separately shows that in this verse it means the heedfulness and presence of the heart, as opposed to heedlessness and forgetfulness. Thus, "the remembrance of God" represents a mental and intellectual remembrance, while "prayer and almsgiving" represent practical and physical remembrance.

Given the above contrast, this expression—"*from the remembrance of Allah and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of poor-rate*"—means that nothing distracts them from their permanent remembrance of their Lord with their hearts, nor from their temporary remembrance of Him through their actions, such as prayer and almsgiving. This shows the excellent match between *tijārah* and *bayʿ* on one hand, and remembrance, prayer and almsgiving on the other hand. The meaning of the verse can be reduced to: "They are not distracted by any means of diversion, whether permanent or temporary, from God's remembrance, whether permanently or temporarily." The reader should reflect on this.

… they fear a day in which the hearts and the eyes shall turn about: That would be the Day of Resurrection. Using the article *al-* with plural names, such as *al-qulūb* and *al-abṣār* (the hearts and the eyes) shows universality. Therefore, it applies to the hearts and eyes of both the believers and the disbelievers.

Given the verses of the Qur'an about the Day of Resurrection, the turning of the hearts and eyes will be due to the unveiling of the realities in the hereafter. For example He says: *But now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight today is sharp* (50:22), *And what they never thought of shall become plain to them from Allah* (39:47), and so on.

The hearts and eyes will be turned away from the visions that they had in this world, which had preoccupied them from God and veiled them from the truth and facts. Instead, they will be turned toward another type of vision, which is seeing through the light of faith (*īmān*) and divine knowledge (*maʿrifah*). As a result, believers—who are endowed with the light of their Lord, meaning the light of faith and divine knowledge—will behold God's magnanimity and munificence [upon them]. The disbelievers, on the other hand, will be blind and will not find anything except what troubles and distresses them. God says: *And the earth shall beam with the light of its Lord* (39:69), *On that day you will see the faithful men and the faithful women—their light running before them and on their right hand* (57:12), *And whoever is blind in this, he shall (also) be blind in the hereafter*" (17:72), *(Some) faces*

on that day shall be bright, looking to their Lord (75:22-23), and: *Nay! Most surely they shall on that day be debarred from their Lord* (83:15).

The following points should be clear given the above explanations:

(1) Out of the numerous qualities of the Day of Resurrection, this verse only mentions the turning of the hearts and the eyes. What is special with the hearts and the eyes is their connection with the theme of these verses. These verses are meant to describe the means by which one can achieve God's light, which is the light of faith and gnosis, and which will exactly be the source of illumination [of the hearts] and sight [of the eyes] on the Day of Resurrection.[1]

(2) "*The hearts and the eyes*" mean "the souls and their insights."

(3) This verse [24:37] refers to the Day of Resurrection as "*a day in which the hearts and the eyes shall turn about*" in order to indicate the cause of the believers' fear. They fear that day *because* it is a day in which the hearts and the eyes are overturned. This overturning is indeed frightening because one of its two possible outcomes is being deprived from seeing God's light. This means being blocked from meeting God's magnanimity and munificence, which amounts to eternal damnation and everlasting punishment. This shows that they are, in fact, afraid of themselves [that is, the evils of their soul].

لِيَجْزِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ ما عَمِلُوا وَ يَزِيدَهُمْ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَ اللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسابٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

(24:38) ***That Allah may give them the best reward of what they have done, and give them more out of His grace*** (**faḍlihi**)***; and Allah gives sustenance to whom He will without reckoning.***

Apparently, the word "that" (the letter *lām*) at the beginning of this verse indicates the goal and purpose (*ghāyah*) of the righteous deeds of the believers discussed in the previous verses. There shall be a good reward for every good deed that God has ordained in His Book. Giving them the "best reward" for what they have done means that in any given form of obedience, God will reward them according to the best action of that type. This effectively means that He will mend and purify their acts, and will not

1 In other words, the Day of Resurrection is a day when the means of acquiring God's light of faith and gnosis will cease to function. It is also a day when the hearts and eyes of those who do not have this light will be left in utter darkness. (Trans.)

scrutinize the shortcomings and imperfections in their actions that would reduce their value. Instead, He will count their good deeds as the best deeds. This interpretation is confirmed by the subsequent part of the verse: "*and Allah gives sustenance to whom He will without reckoning*," which suggests that the believers will not be subject to meticulous reckoning of their good deeds. God will overlook the imperfections in their deeds, and will classify their good deeds together with their best deeds.

***… and give them more out of His grace* (faḍlihi)…:** *Faḍl* means *ʿaṭāʾ* (bestowal, conferment, grace). This statement explicitly says that God will give them, from His grace, what goes beyond their good deeds. An even more explicit expression is: *They have therein what they wish and with Us is more yet* (50:35). Given the contradistinction in this verse [50:35], it follows that "more" is something beyond anything that they may wish.

According to the Book of God, the believers' reward will be what they wish, as He says: *They shall have with their Lord what they wish* (39:34), *Or the abiding garden which those who guard (against evil) are promised? That shall be a reward and a resort for them. They shall have therein what they wish abiding (in it)* (25:15-16), and: *They shall have in them what they wish* (16:31). Therefore, the "more" that is given to them on top of the reward of their deeds [in verses 24:38 and 50:35], is something so sublime and magnificent that even the highest wish or want of human beings would fall short of it. This is the most astonishing promise and glad tiding that the Qur'an gives the believers. The reader should carefully reflect on this.

***… and Allah gives sustenance* (yarzuqu, from rizq) *to whom He will without reckoning* (ḥisāb):** This is an independent sentence that effectively explains and justifies the previous two promises in the verse by referring them to God's will. In this sense, it is similar to what we read above: "*Allah guides to His light whom He will*," (24:35) as we discussed it. God's *rizq* (sustenance, provision) is a bestowment that is purely from Him, in the sense that (1) no creature has a say in it [that is, in its amount and its distribution]; and (2) no one has any entitlement to it; meaning that it is not something that God owes to His creatures. Thus, it is up to God to allot whatever sustenance and grace that He wills, to whomever He wills.

The gist of the verse is that because of their righteous deeds, the believers qualify for some reward that matches their actions. This idea is found in many verses, such as: *And every soul shall be paid in full what it has done* (16:111). However, as mentioned earlier, God will reward each of their righteous deeds according to their best deed of that type, without scrutiny in their reckoning. This is a part of God's *rizq* (undeserved sustenance) without *ḥisāb* (reckoning, measure, expectation). Then, on top of that, He gives

them something that is higher and more sublime than anything that they can even wish for. This is an additional *rizq* without *ḥisāb*.

Even though no one is entitled to God's *rizq* [as defined above], God Himself has promised to give His creatures sustenance [in verse 51:22], and has taken a vow to fulfil this promise: *And by the Lord of the heavens and the earth! It is most surely the truth* (51:23). Therefore, He has given them entitlement to basic sustenance, which He delivers to them in accordance to their work and effort.[1] However, He has not given them entitlement over anything additional to that. Hence, it is up to Him to bestow additional sustenance upon anyone that He wills. This means that there is no other cause for the additional blessings and bestowments except His will. This topic needs further elaboration, which we shall present in a separate discussion, by God's will.

وَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمالُهُمْ كَسَرابٍ بِقِيعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمْآنُ ماءً حَتَّى إِذا جاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئاً وَ وَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فَوَفَّاهُ حِسابَهُ وَ اللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسابِ ﴿٣٩﴾

(24:39) ***And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage* (ka-sarāb)** ***in a desert* (bi-qīʿah)*, which the thirsty person* (al-ẓamʾān)** ***supposes to be water; until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught, and there he finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full; and Allah is quick in reckoning.***

Sarāb (mirage) is what shines in the desert as though it were water, while there is no reality to it. *Qīʿ* and *qāʿ* mean "level ground." They are the plural forms of *qīʿah* and *qāʿah*, much like *tīnah* (fig) and *tamrah* (date) [which are the singular forms of *tīn* and *tamr*, respectively]. *Ẓamʾān* means *ʿaṭshān* (thirsty).

In the previous verses, God referred to the believers and described them as those who remember Him in exalted houses, and who are not distracted from Him by merchandise or sale. Because of these qualities, God, Who is the Light of the heavens and the earth, shall guide them to His light, meaning that He will honor and bless them by the light of knowing Him (*maʿrifah*). This verse and the next one contrast the above verses by describing the disbelievers. In one analogy, their actions are likened to a mirage, in

1 This means that the author has taken God's unconditional promise of sustenance to be (implicitly) qualified by their work and effort. (Trans.)

the sense that they are fruitless, empty and without any reality. In another analogy, their actions are compared to layers of darkness on top of one another, not just devoid of any light but even blocking all light. This verse discusses the first description.

And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert, which the thirsty person supposes to be water; until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught…: This is the analogy for the disbelievers' acts of worship—like offerings, litany and so on—by which they sought nearness to their gods. These acts of theirs are compared to a mirage in a desert. One imagines the mirage to be water, but there is no reality to it and it lacks the properties of water—such as quenching thirst and so on.

The verse specifically says *al-ẓamʾān* (the thirsty), even though a mirage appears like water to *everyone*. This is because the verse is about the one who *chases* a mirage, and that would be a thirsty person, who is driven toward it because of his thirst. This idea is confirmed by the subsequent part of the verse: *until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught*. It is as if the verse is saying more elaborately: Their deeds are like a mirage in a desert, which the thirsty individual imagines to be water. Thus he sets out for it and moves toward it in order to drink from it and quench his thirst. He keeps on going until when he comes to it, but then he finds it to be nothing.

The verse says "comes to it" (*jāʾahu*)—instead of expressions like "reaches it" (*balaghahu*), "attains it" (*waṣala ilayhi*) or "ends at it" (*intahā ilayhi*)—to allude to the idea that someone is waiting for them and expecting them to come. That is God. Thus the next part of the verse: *and there he finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full*. This means that the disbelievers also seek success and happiness as their goal, like all other people, since they have the same innate human nature (*fiṭrah*). They endeavor to achieve this innate and natural goal through their actions. However, neither their actions can get them to this goal, nor is there any reality to the gods from whom they seek a good reward for their deeds. Instead, their actions will lead them to God, Who encompasses their actions and recompenses them for their deeds.

… He pays back to him his reckoning in full…: This is an indirect way of referring to the reward that they deserve according to the reckoning and measure of their deeds.

Based on the above discussion, the verse compares the disbelievers' actions to a mirage, and compares them to a thirsty person who wants thirst-quenching water but actually turns away from it and misses it. He has a master who sincerely advises him and calls him to drink from real water, but he does not listen to the master. Instead, he thinks the mirage

to be water, turns to it, and goes after it. When he arrives at the mirage, he will find his master who had been sincerely advising him and calling him to drink from real water. This is compared to when the disbelievers will return to God at the time of their death, which is the end of the time for action.

The disbelievers deviate from the remembrance of their Lord and righteous deeds that lead them to His light, which is the key to their felicity. They think that their salvation is in the hands of the other gods which they call upon, and that to attain happiness they should make offerings that bring them closer to these gods. That is why they completely engage themselves in empty actions that have no reality, like a mirage. Thus they pass their life, exhausting their assets and effort in this way, until the time of their death. At that point they come to witness the next abode, but they will not find any of the good and return that they were anticipating to achieve through what they used to do. Neither do they find their gods to have any impact or authority [in that realm]. That is when God will pay them back their reckoning in full; "*and Allah is quick in reckoning*."

… and Allah is quick in reckoning: This is because His knowledge encompasses everything equally, whether little or much, small or big, subtle or large, old or new.

This verse is apparently and primarily about those who reject divine religions, particularly the polytheists and idolaters among them. However, it also applies to any atheist; that is, anyone who does not believe in God as the Creator of the universe. All people contemplate their well-being in life, and know for certain that the way to achieve happiness is by the actions that they do. Now, if a person believes in a Creator and sees Him as influential in his attainment of happiness in one way or another, then he will direct his actions toward winning the satisfaction of that Creator, in Whose hands lies the person's felicity. But if he denies the Creator, and believes in other sources of impact in the universe, he will direct his actions to those other sources—such as nature, matter and time. Such a person seeks his happiness in the life of this world, for he does not believe in afterlife.

Such individuals see their happiness and felicity to be in the hands of sources of power other than God. However, there is no source of power and impact other than Him! They view their activities in this world as a means of attaining happiness, whereas such activity is nothing but a mirage. Thus, they continue to work, until they finish their allotted share of time for acting in this world by the advent of death. At that point, they will find no result of what they had done, and will see that their hopes and ambitions were only imaginary dreams of the sleepers. That is when God pays them back their reckoning in full; "*and Allah is quick in reckoning*."

أَوْ كَظُلُماتٍ فِي بَحْرٍ لُجِّيٍّ يَغْشاهُ مَوْجٌ مِنْ فَوْقِهِ مَوْجٌ مِنْ فَوْقِهِ سَحابٌ ظُلُماتٌ بَعْضُها فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ إِذا أَخْرَجَ يَدَهُ لَمْ يَكَدْ يَراها وَ مَنْ لَمْ يَجْعَلِ اللَّهُ لَهُ نُوراً فَما لَهُ مِنْ نُورٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

(24:40) ***Or like utter darkness in the deep sea: there covers it a wave above which is another wave, above which is a cloud, (layers of) utter darkness one above another; when he holds out his hand, he is almost unable to see it; and to whomsoever Allah does not give light, he has no light.***

This is a second analogy for the actions of the disbelievers, indicating that their deeds are like dense veils that cover their hearts from receiving the light of divine knowledge (*maʿrifah*). The Qur'an repeatedly says that they are in layers of darkness. Some examples are: *And (as to) those who disbelieve, their guardians are false gods who take them out of the light into the darkness* (2:257), *Like him whose likeness is that of one in utter darkness whence he cannot come forth* (6:122), and: *Nay! Rather, what they used to do has become like rust upon their hearts. Nay! Most surely they shall on that day be debarred from their Lord* (83:14-15).

***Or like utter darkness in the deep sea* (baḥrin lujjī)…:** The conjunction "or" connects the analogy in this verse to the one in the last verse: *like a mirage…* (24:39). *Baḥrin lujjī* means "a turbulent sea with surging waves." It is derived from *lujjat al-baḥr*, which means "the surge of ocean waves." The meaning is: Their actions are like layers of darkness in a turbulent sea.

…there covers it a wave above which is another wave, above which is a cloud…: This is a description of the sea and its layers of darkness. The sea is covered by a wave, upon which there is another wave, above which is a cloud that veils everything underneath from receiving any light from the sun, the moon, or the stars.

…(layers of) utter darkness one above another…: This clarifies that the above forms of darkness are layers of dense darkness one on top of another, not separate from each other. This is then emphasized by: *when he holds out his hand, he is almost unable to see it*. The closest thing that one can see is one's own body, and out of all organs, the hand is the easiest part to see because one can hold it up, right in front of his eyes. So, if one is almost unable to see his own hand when he holds it up, it shows the intensity of the darkness that engulfs the person.

These people [that is, the disbelievers] are journeying toward God, as

their destination, by means of their actions. In this journey, they are like one who is going through a turbulent sea that is covered by a cloud, with one wave above another. They are covered by the thickest possible layers of darkness, without there being any light to help them see and find their way to the shore of deliverance.

… and to whomsoever Allah does not give light, he has no light: They have no light because God has not given them any. This only makes sense, because God is the giver of light, for *He is* the Light of everything. That is why if He does not assign light to something, then it will have no light, for there is no source of light other than Him.

أَ لَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ الطَّيْرُ صَافَّاتٍ كُلٌّ قَدْ عَلِمَ صَلاتَهُ وَ تَسْبِيحَهُ وَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِما يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

(24:41) *Do you not see that Allah is glorified by everyone in the heavens and the earth, and the (very) birds with expanded wings? Each knows its prayer and glorification, and Allah is Knower of what they do.*

The following points were discussed in the previous verses: (1) God is the light that illuminates the heavens and the earth. (2) He assigns a special, extra light to the believers amongst His servants. (3) The disbelievers have no share of this light. In this verse and the four next verses, He provides arguments for these points.

As for God being "*the Light of the heavens and the earth*" (24:35), it is because anything that exists in the heavens and the earth is not self-existent. It is not independent in its existence, and does not owe its existence to another being that is also needy in its existence. This shows that the existence of any being in the heavens and the earth is from God, Who is the ending point of all needs.

Any being in the heavens and the earth [that is, in all realms of existence] displays not only its own existence, but also the existence of the One Who is bestowing existence upon it. It is in this sense that He is a "Light" Which illuminates other beings.[1] These beings point to their Source of Light because they are illuminated by Him, proving that there is a Light that is illuminating everything. Therefore, every being in the heavens and the earth

1 Thus the word "light" in "*Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth*" (24:35) means *wujūd* (existence, being) in the sense that it makes things observable, whether outwardly or inwardly. (Trans.)

is a proof [by its very existence] that there is something beyond it, which is far from the darkness that has covered it, free from the need which is concomitant with it, and clear from the imperfection that is inseparable from it [that is, something that has no aspect of limitation and contingence]. This is God's *tasbīḥ* (glorification, declaration of purity) within everything in the heavens and the earth. Its implication is negating the *independence* of any object other than Him, and denying every god and lord that may direct the affairs of the creatures other than Him.

This explanation is what is meant when the verse says: *Do you not see that Allah is glorified by everyone in the heavens and the earth, and the (very) birds with expanded wings? Each knows its prayer and glorification*. This is God's proof for being the Light of the heavens and the earth, because light is that by which things become apparent and visible, and their appearance then is evidence of the light which has manifested them. God is the One Who manifests things and brings them to existence, and He points to His own manifestation and existence through His act of manifestation and existentiation [of the beings].

The verse also involves some subtle points that complement its argument:

First Point: The verse specifically mentions two categories of beings: (1) the intelligent beings in the heavens and the earth, as indicated by using the particle *man* ("those who…"); and (2) "*the birds with expanded wings*." These are only a subset of living creatures, whereas all beings in existence glorify Him, as He says: *And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise* (17:44).

Perhaps these groups of creatures are specifically mentioned because they are among the wonders of creation. The appearance of intelligent beings—indicated by "*everyone in the heavens and the earth*"—is a fascinating aspect of creation that bewilders the intellect of any intelligent observer. Similarly, the flying of birds with extended wings in the atmosphere is among the most marvelous signs of creation in the world of sentient animals.

Here is an alternative explanation that is inferred from the discussion of some exegetes: "*Everyone in the heavens and the earth*" includes *all* beings. The verse refers to them by using a particle that is used for intelligent beings [that is, the Arabic particle *man*] because glorification is something that is commonly and naturally done by intelligent beings only. Another possible explanation for this usage is that it indicates the strength and purity of their glorification. All beings glorify God through their *lisān al-ḥāl* (state of being, mode of existence, language of condition), but their proof of God's purity is at such a degree that it is compared to literal utterance and speech (*maqāl*).

The problem with the above view is that it is not compatible with the ascription of knowledge to them in what follows in the verse: *Each knows its prayer and glorification*.

Second Point: The verse starts with "*Do you not see*…," which shows that their glorification—that is, their indication of God's purity—is so clear and evident that no one would doubt it. It is very common to refer to certain knowledge as "seeing." One example is the verse: *Do you not see that Allah created the heavens and the earth?* (14:19).

Even though "*Do you not see*" in this verse is in the second person singular, the real audience is all intelligent beings. It could also be that the address is particularly to the Prophet, referring to God's unveiling of the hidden dimensions of the heavens and earth to him. Part of what God showed him was that all beings—"*everyone in the heavens and the earth, and the birds with expanded wings*"—glorify God. The Prophet having such vision should be no surprise for us, because the people saw even pebbles glorify God in his palm, as reported in reliable narrations.

Third Point: The verse ascribes knowledge [of prayer and glorification] to "*everyone in the heavens and the earth, and the birds*." We discussed this in the exposition of the verse: *And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification* (17:44).[1] We shall complement that with another discussion in Chapter 41 [under verse 41:20-21], by God's will.

Some exegetes have said that the subject of the verb "know"—in "*Each knows its prayer and glorification*"—is God.[2] The problem with this view is that the theme and context of the verse does not support it, especially given the next part of the verse: *and Allah is Knower of what they do*.

Another suggested view is that these beings do not really have knowledge of their prayer and glorification, but the verse ascribes knowledge to them metaphorically, in order to convey that they bear very clear and strong indications of God's glory and purity. This interpretation is also incompatible with the theme and context of the verse.

Fourth Point: The verse only mentions *tasbīḥ* (glorification, declaration of purity), even though the beings also do *taḥmīd* (praise, declaration of excellence) by indicating and manifesting God's qualities of perfection. This is proven by rational arguments and it is also confirmed by the verse: *And*

1 See volume 25, p. 148 of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 The verse would then be saying: "For each of them, God knows its prayer and glorification." This is the interpretation adopted by most English translators of the Qur'an. (Trans.)

there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise (17:44). Perhaps the reason for this is that the theme of these verses is to assert God's oneness, and to negate polytheism. This is more closely and directly related to *tasbīḥ* [than *taḥmīd*]. Those who call upon gods besides Allah, and refer to them in one way or another, are considered disbelievers because they effectively imply that a "god" is a being which possesses limitation and imperfection. Hence, the counter position to this would be negating these qualities from the real God, which is *tasbīḥ*, not *taḥmīd*. The reader should reflect on this.

Making reference to prayer—in "*Each knows its prayer and glorification*"—is also in line with the above point. Here, *ṣalāh* (prayer) means *duʿāʾ* (supplication, request), which is when the supplicant turns the attention of the supplicated [that is, God] toward his need and request.[1] Prayer, in this sense, shows that the supplicant is needy of something, while the supplicated is needless of it. This, again, is more closely related to God's *tasbīḥ* than His *taḥmīd*.

Fifth Point: The verse ascribes glorification, and the knowledge of it, to "*everyone in the heavens and the earth*," which includes both believers and disbelievers. Thus, it can be deduced that there are two lights:

(1) A general and universal light that covers all beings, and is shared equally by believers and disbelievers. Some verses refer to this light, such as: *And He made them bear witness against their own souls: Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes! We bear witness. Lest you should say on the day of resurrection: Surely we were heedless of this* (7:172), and: *But now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight today is sharp* (50:22).

(2) A special and particular light, which exclusively belongs to God's friends (*awliyāʾ*) among the believers, and which was the subject of the previous verses [24:35-38].

Therefore, the light with which God illuminates His creation is twofold, much like the mercy (*raḥmah*) that He shows to them. God has a universal mercy and a particular mercy. The first one is mentioned in the verse: *And My mercy encompasses all things* (7:156), and the second one in: *Then as to those who believed and did good, their Lord will make them enter into His mercy* (45:30). Both types of mercy are mentioned in the verse: *O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah and believe in His Messenger: He will give you two portions of His mercy, and make for you a light* (57:28), where "light" [in "*make for you a light*" (57:28)] is the same as "*light upon*

1 This is based on the view that the root meaning of *ṣalāh* is "to turn and incline toward something," as the author has discussed under verse 2:157, in volume 2, p. 215 of the English translation. (Trans.)

light" [in verse 24:35], which corresponds to the second type of mercy [that is, God's particular mercy that is exclusively for the believers].

… and Allah is Knower of what they do: One of the things that "they do" is their glorification of God. For some creatures at certain levels of being, their glorification is by their mere existence, but since that is also a form of glorification, it is permissible to call it something that "they do" in this sense.

Saying that He knows what they do, after mentioning the glorification of the beings, involves a message for the believers and for the disbelievers. For the believers, it is a message of appreciation and acknowledgment, as well as encouragement, because it means that their Lord knows their glorification and will soon reward them for it. At the same time, it completes God's proof and argument against the disbelievers, because part of His knowledge of what they do is writing their deeds. God's knowledge includes the records of deeds [for voluntary individual acts] as well as the Clear Book (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*) [for creational and existential properties]. These books and records comprise all actions, including (1) their glorification by their very state of being; and (2) their voluntary denial by their tongues.

وَ لِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ إِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤٢﴾

(24:42) ***And to Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and to Allah is the eventual coming.***

This verse is positioned between two verses that have two different themes. The previous verse—"*Do you not see that Allah is He Whom do glorify…*" (24:41)—was an argument for God's universal light that encompasses everything. The next verse—"*Do you not see that Allah drives along…*" (24:43)—is an argument for the exclusivity of His particular light [to the believers]. This suggests that the current verse (24:42) is a middle ground between the two themes, meaning that it relates to both points. God's kingdom and sovereignty over all things, and their return to Him, show two points: (1) His universal light is comprehensive and all-encompassing. (2) He has total authority to assign and give His particular light to whomever He wants. He does what He wills and rules as He wants.

And to Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth…: This sentence ascribes and restricts all kingdoms to God alone. Therefore, it is up to Him to do as He wills and rule as He wants. *He is not questioned concerning what He does but they shall be questioned* (21:23). An implication of His exclusive sovereignty over all things is that they all return to Him. Given that there is no king other than Him, and He is the ending and returning point of all things, it follows that He can do as He wills and rule as He wants.

The above explanation should clarify that "*to Allah is the eventual coming*" refers to God as the point of reference and return in all affairs, not just in the hereafter. Thus, this sentence would be similar to the verse: *Lo! Surely to Allah do all affairs eventually come* (42:53). God knows best.

أَ لَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُزْجِي سَحاباً ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ رُكاماً فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ
يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلالِهِ وَ يُنَزِّلُ مِنَ السَّماءِ مِنْ جِبالٍ فِيها مِنْ بَرَدٍ فَيُصِيبُ بِهِ
مَنْ يَشاءُ وَ يَصْرِفُهُ عَنْ مَنْ يَشاءُ يَكادُ سَنا بَرْقِهِ يَذْهَبُ بِالْأَبْصارِ ﴿٤٣﴾

(24:43) *Do you not see that Allah drives along* (yuzjī, from izjāʾ) *the clouds, then gathers them together, then piles them up* (rukāman), *so that you see the rain* (al-wadq) *coming forth from their midst* (khilālihi)*? And He sends down from the heaven from mountains therein of hail, afflicting therewith whom He will and turning it away from whom He will; the flash of His lightning almost takes away the sight.*

Izjāʾ means *dafʿ* (to drive, to push along, to propel); *rukām* means "piled and packed together, one on top of one another"; *wadq* means "rain." *Khilāl* is the plural of *khalal*, meaning "a split and opening between two things."

This verse is addressed to the Prophet [in the second person: "*Do you not see…*"] only in the sense that he can hear and receive the message [a general quality which is equally found in others]. Therefore, it is really addressed to any audience who receives the message. The meaning is: Do you—and anyone who can see—not see that God drives dispersed clouds by winds, gathers them together, and then piles and packs them up on top of one another, where you can see rain coming out from the splits and openings between them and falls on the earth?

… And He sends down from the heaven **(al-samāʾ)** ***from mountains*** **(jibāl)** ***therein of hail*** **(barad)***, afflicting therewith whom He will and turning it away from whom He will; the flash* **(sanā)** *of His lightning almost takes away the sight:* *Samāʾ* means "above," which is then interpreted by "*from mountains therein*." *Jibāl* is the plural of *jabal* (mountain), which is then interpreted by "*hail*." *Barad* (hail) means "precipitation of ice pieces that fall from the sky." "Mountains" of hail refer to their abundance and concentration. *Sanā* means "light." The conjunction "and" [in "*And He sends down*"] joins this part of the verse to "drives along" at the beginning of the verse.

The meaning is: Do you not see that God sends down from the heaven hail, that has been piled up like mountains, by which He afflicts whomever

He wills, causing the destruction of the farms and gardens, and sometimes the death of people and livestock? And He turns it away from whomever He wills, thus they are not harmed by it. The light of its lightning almost blinds the sight.

Given the context, this verse serves to explain and justify the previous verses about God's exclusive bestowal of His [particular] light to the believers. The effective meaning is: The matter of whom to give light is up to God, much like the case of rain and hail. As you can see, whenever He wants He sends down rain from the sky to benefit the people, their livestock, their farms and their gardens; and whenever He wants He sends down hail, with which He strikes whomever He wills and spares whomever He wills.

يُقَلِّبُ اللَّهُ اللَّيْلَ وَ النَّهارَ إِنَّ فِي ذلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِأُولِي الْأَبْصارِ ﴿٤٤﴾

(24:44) ***Allah turns over the night and the day; most surely there is a lesson in this for those who have sight.***

This is another way of illustrating that the affairs [in the world] go back to God's will alone. "Turning over the night and the day" means exchanging and replacing one with another. The meaning of the verse is clear.

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَابَّةٍ مِنْ مَاءٍ ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ بَطْنِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ رِجْلَيْنِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ أَرْبَعٍ ۚ يَخْلُقُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤٥﴾

(24:45) ***And Allah has created from water every living creature: so of them is that which walks upon its belly, and of them is that which walks upon two feet, and of them is that which walks upon four; Allah creates what He will; surely Allah has power over all things.***

This is another illustration for the return of all affairs to God's will alone. It says that God has created all creatures from water, but then they differ in terms of how they walk: some of them walk on their bellies, such as snakes and worms; some of them walk on two feet, like humans and birds; and some of them are quadruped such as most livestock and many wild animals. The verse mentions only these three categories—even though there is more—for brevity; the purpose of the verse is achieved by this much.

… Allah creates what He will…: This explains and justifies the previous difference among the creatures despite their creation from the same substance. It shows that the matter is purely up to God's will. He has the right

to bestow some of His grace upon all of His creatures, such as His universal light and His universal mercy, and He also has the right to bestow some of His grace exclusively to a part of His creatures, such as His particular light and His particular mercy.

… surely Allah has power over all things: This sentence provides the reason and justification for the previous statement: *Allah creates what He will*. It says that God has absolute and unconditional power, which necessitates that the occurrence of any act does not hinge on anything beyond His will. Otherwise, His power would be conditional on the achievement of that condition, and that would be a contradiction. This is a subtle topic with regards to *tawḥīd* (monotheism, God's unity), which we shall clarify by the will of God in the following discussion.

Philosophical Discussion: The Meaning of God's Causation of Things

All contingent beings are effects that are ultimately caused by, and trace back to, the Necessary Being [as their original and uncaused cause]. Also, the existence of many contingent beings—particularly material beings—hinges on certain conditions without which they cannot come to existence. One example is the human being, which is born as a child. Without having parents, the human being's existence does not materialize—not to mention many other temporal and spatial conditions. Now, if the occurrence of some event is conditional on some condition, then that condition would be part of the complete cause (*al-ʿillat al-tāmmah*) of that event. If so, it follows that the Necessary Being is not Himself the complete cause of events alone, but He is *a part thereof*.

With regards to the whole universe, He is the complete cause, because in that case there is nothing else to act as a condition. Similarly, He is the complete cause with regards to the first emanation (*al-ṣādir al-awwal*), from which the rest of the creation emanate.[1] However, with regards to the rest of the creation, He can only be *a part of* their complete cause, because each of them is preceded in existence by some intermediate cause and [in some cases] depends on certain conditions and preparatory causes. This is what we can say when we consider each being alone, and want to ascribe it separately to the Necessary Being.

Yet, there is another view that is subtler than the above: The causal

1 This refers to the Neoplatonic theory of emanation (*ifāḍah*, *fayaḍān*), which was fully adopted and incorporated in Islamic philosophy and mysticism, to the point of composing their identity. (Trans.)

existential link that undeniably exists between any being and other contingent beings—as its causes, conditions and/or preparatory causes—necessitates some unity and connection between them. Therefore, no part of this link is separate and free from the other parts, and the very existence of each is tied to, and defined by, all other things to which it is connected. Its existence and identity is linked to the other beings.

In our example of the human being above, we considered an individual to be an independent being and a unit of existence that is not tied to anything, and then we realized that its existence hinges on various causes and conditions, one of which is the Necessary Being. However, with the second view, the person would be a unit and identity that is tied to every cause and condition that it depends on other than the Necessary Being. So the *reality* of a person—Zayd, for instance—is "a human individual who is the son of so-and-so and so-and-so, born in such a time and place, preceded by certain events, concomitant with certain events," and so on, including all contingent events and beings that are related to Zayd's existence.

This is the reality of Zayd [in its entirety]. Evidently, one whose reality is as such would only depend on the Necessary Being for its existence. Thus, his complete cause is the Necessary Being; his existence does not hinge on anything else [as either a cause, condition or preparatory cause]; and he only needs His will in order to exist. In this case, God's power with respect to any being would be absolute and unconditional. This is the meaning of: *Allah creates what He will; surely Allah has power over all things* (24:45).

لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا آيَاتٍ مُبَيِّنَاتٍ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٤٦﴾

(24:46) *Certainly We have revealed clear communications, and Allah guides whom He will to the straight path.*

"Clear communications" refer to the Verse of Light and its following verses that describe God's light. "The straight path" is the route on which its travelers are safe from error and God's wrath, as He says: *Guide us on the straight path. The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors, not those upon whom Thy wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray* (1:6-7). We discussed the straight path in our exposition of Chapter 1.[1]

The first part of the verse does not say "revealed to you," but it simply says: *Certainly We have revealed clear communications*. This is unlike what

1 See volume 1, pp. 60ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

we saw a few verses ago: *And certainly We have sent to you clarifying communications and a description of those who have passed away before you, and an admonition to those who guard [against evil]* (24:34). This difference can be explained by the subsequent part of the current verse: *and Allah guides whom He will to the straight path* (24:46). Had the first part said, "*Certainly We have revealed clear communications to you*," then the subsequent part—"*and Allah guides whom He will*"—might have given the impression that guidance from God is a matter of verbal explanation and identification of the straight path [as in the case of revealing communications]. This would imply that all the readers of these verses are considered to be guided to the straight path, which is not true, because amongst them were hypocrites and those who had disease in their hearts. God knows best.[1]

Examining Narrations

(1) ʿAbbās b. Hilāl said: I asked Imam al-Riḍā about God's words, "*Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth*" (24:35). He said: "[It means that] He is a Guide for the inhabitants of the heavens, and a Guide for the inhabitants of the earth."[2]

(2) In al-Barqī's version of the above account, the Imam says: "He is the guidance of those who are in the heavens, and the guidance of those who are in the earth."[3]

Author's comment: It could be that "guidance" in these narrations refers to the *particular* sense of guidance as it applies to human beings, which means religious guidance to human felicity. That would be one level of the verse's meaning. It could also be that "guidance" refers to God's *universal* guidance, which is taking every being to it is appropriate perfection. That would comply with our interpretation above.

(3) Isḥāq b. Jarīr said: Once a lady asked me to get permission for her to see Imam al-Ṣādiq. He gave her permission and she went there

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1 In other words, the "guidance" mentioned at the end of the verse—"*Allah guides whom He will to the straight path*"—is in the sense of making one reach the destination, not merely showing them the way, because of the qualification "*whom He will*." This sense of guidance—as an existential growth which hinges on God's will—is different from God's revelation of verses, which is universal. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

3 The two narrations effectively mean the same. That is, God is the means, source and cause of guidance of those who are in the heavens and those who are in the earth. (Trans.)

with her freed bondmaid. She asked the Imam, "O Abā ʿAbd-Allah! What does God mean by: *an olive-tree that is neither eastern nor western*' (24:35)?" He replied, "O lady! Surely God has not set forth parables for trees, but He has mentioned parables only for the children of Adam."[1]

(4) Concerning verse 24:35, Ṭalḥah b. Zayd said: Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad narrated from his father: "*Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth*": He starts by mentioning His own light. "*The likeness of His light*": this is an analogy for His guidance in a believer's heart. "*Is as a niche in which is a lamp*": the niche is a believer's inside, the glass is his heart, and the lamp is the light that God has placed in his heart. "*Lit from a blessed tree*": the tree is the believer. "*An olive-tree that is neither eastern nor western*": it is on the top of the mountain. "Not western" means that there is no east for it, and "not eastern" means that there is no west for it. It observes and receives light from the sun, both when the sun rises and when it sets. "*The oil whereof almost gives light*": the light that is in his heart is about to shine even if he does not speak. "*Light upon light*": One *farīḍah* (obligatory act) upon another, and one *sunnah* (recommended, supererogatory act) upon another. "*Allah guides to His light whom He will*": God guides to His obligatory and recommended duties whomever He wills. "*And Allah sets forth parables for the people*": this is a parable that God has set forth for the believers.

He [Imam al-Bāqir or al-Ṣādiq] then said: A believer is ever in five lights: (1) His entrance is in light. (2) His existence is in light. (3) His knowledge is light. (4) His speech is light. (5) His way to Paradise on the Day of Resurrection will be in light.

I [the narrator, Ṭalḥah b. Zayd] told Jaʿfar, "Others say that this is a likeness for the light of the Lord."[2] "Glory be to God! There is no likeness," he said, "for God. God says: *Therefore do not give likenesses to Allah; surely Allah knows and you do not know* (16:74)."[3]

Author's comment: This narration confirms our exposition of the verse. In interpreting some parts of the verse, the Imam only mentions some of its applications, such as what he says about "*the oil whereof almost gives light*"

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

2 Given the Imam's reply and the author's explanation below, this means: "a likeness for God's quality of being light," which means "a likeness for God." (Trans.)

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration.

and "*light upon light*."

The Imam's statement, "Glory be to God! There is no likeness for God," means that the given analogy in the verse does not describe "light" as one of God's names which is predicated on Him [and thus refers to God Himself]. If something were to be a likeness for God [Himself], then that would necessitate either incarnation (*ḥulūl*) or transformation (*inqilāb*),[1] while God is far exalted above both. Instead, the verse is an example and analogy for God's light which has emanated upon the heavens and the earth. As with the pronoun "His" [or "his"] in "*the likeness of His light*," there is no problem if we refer it to God, as long as we maintain a sound interpretation.[2]

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq was once asked about the following words of God: *Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp* (24:35). He said: This is an analogy that God has made for us [the Household of the Prophet]. The Prophet and the Imams are part of God's proofs. They are His signs by which people find their way to monotheism, religious betterment, laws of Islam, recommended acts, and obligatory duties—and there is no might except by God, the Most High, the Most Magnificent.[3]

Author's comment: This narration refers to some instances and examples of the verse. It provides the best applications of the verse: the Prophet and the pure ones from his Household. Otherwise, the verse is apparently more general than that, and it includes other prophets, their successors, and the saints. Nevertheless, the verse does not apply to all believers because of certain qualities that are not found in all of them, such as: *Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah…* (24:37).

There are several Shia narrations that match different parts of the verse with the Prophet and his Household. These are examples of matching and

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1 *Ḥulūl* in this case would be God's incarnation and indwelling in the heavens and the earth. *Inqilāb* would be a transformation and transmutation of God's essence into light or into the limited and defined essence of the heavens and the earth. (Trans.)

2 Overall, the discussion here is meant to clarify the meaning of "His light" in: *the likeness of His light is…* It does not mean "the light which is Him," but it means "the light which belongs to Him." The first meaning springs first to the mind given what is said at the beginning of the verse—"*Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth*"—but the Imam and the author explain that this cannot be true. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Tawḥīd*.

applying the verse (*taṭbīq*), not interpreting its meaning (*tafsīr*). The reason for this is that these narrations differ in terms of *how* they match and apply the verse. Some examples are:

(6) Imam al-Bāqir said: "The niche" (*al-mishkāh*) is Muḥammad's heart. "The lamp" (*al-miṣbāḥ*) is the light that carries knowledge. "The glass" (*al-zujājah*) is ʿAlī or his heart. "The blessed olive-tree that is neither eastern nor western" is Abraham, who "*was neither a Jew nor a Christian*" (3:67). "*The oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not*": their children are about to speak as prophets even though no angel has descended upon them.[1]

(7) Imam al-Bāqir said: "The niche" (*al-mishkāh*) is the light of knowledge in the heart of the Prophet. "The glass" (*al-zujājah*) is ʿAlī's bosom. "*The oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not*": a scholar from Muḥammad's family is about to speak with knowledge even before he is asked. "*Light upon light*": one Imam from Muḥammad's family coming after another Imam, who are supported with the light of knowledge and wisdom.[2]

(8) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "The niche" (*al-mishkāh*) is Fāṭimah. "The lamp" (*al-miṣbāḥ*) is al-Ḥasan. "The glass" (*al-zujājah*) is al-Ḥusayn. "The blessed tree" is Abraham. "Neither eastern nor western": "*was neither a Jew nor a Christian*" (3:67). "*Light upon light*": one Imam after another. "*Allah guides to His light whom He will*": God guides whomever He wills toward the Imams.[3]

(9) Concerning "*olive-tree, neither eastern nor western*" (24:35) the Prophet said: [It refers to] Abraham's heart, which was neither Jewish nor Christian.[4]

Author's comment: This narration mentions one application and example of the verse. Its content has also been narrated through Shia chains from some Imams of Ahl al-Bayt, as quoted above.

(10) When the Messenger of God recited the verse, "*In houses which Allah has permitted to be raised up*" (24:36), a man stood up and asked, "Which houses are these, O Messenger of God?" He said, "The houses of the prophets." Then Abū Bakr stood up and asked, "Is this house also one of them?" pointing to the house of ʿAlī and

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Jābir.

2 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿĪsā b. Rāshid.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ṣāliḥ b. Sahl al-Hamdānī.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

Fāṭimah. He replied, "Yes, it is one of their best."[1]

Author's comment: *Majmaʿ al-bayān* has also narrated this via an incomplete chain of transmission (*mursal*). The same idea is found in the following narration:

(11) Imam al-Bāqir said: These are the houses of the prophets, and the house of ʿAlī is also one of them.[2]

Author's comment: Either way, these narrations provide some applications and examples of the verse, as we said above.

(12) There is a sermon in *Nahj al-balāghah* that the Imam [ʿAlī] delivered after reciting the verse: *Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah* (24:37). In the sermon, he says: Indeed, invocation (*dhikr*) has its people who have adopted it in lieu of this world (*dunyā*). Thus, no engagement in trade or sale distracts them from invocation, with which they pass their days. They cry in the ears of the heedless with deterring shouts against what God has forbidden. They command [them] to justice, and themselves act upon it. They forbid [them from] evil, and themselves abstain from it.

It is as though they have finished the journey from this world to the hereafter, and can observe what lies beyond this world. It is as if they perceive the mysteries of the inhabitants of *barzakh* (the intermediate world between this world and the Day of Resurrection) in their long stay. It is as though the Resurrection has fulfilled its promises for them, and thus they have unveiled them [the secrets and promises of the next world] for the people of this world. It is as if they see what the people see not, and hear what they hear not…

(13) Concerning "*Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts*" (24:37) it is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: "These are some people who, when the time of prayer comes, they leave their business and go for the prayer. Their reward is greater than those who do not do any trade."[3]

Author's comment: That is, their reward is greater than those who do not do any trade but engage in the remembrance of God. This idea is also found in other narrations.

(14) Concerning "*Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts*

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Anas b. Mālik and Buraydah.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via his chain of narration, on the authority of Jābir.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

from the remembrance of Allah" (24:37) the Prophet said: They are those "*who travel in the land seeking of the bounty of Allah*" (73:20).[1]

Authors' comment: This narration seems to be incomplete. Its complement can be inferred from the following narration [concerning the same phrase]:

(15) Ibn ʿAbbās said: It refers to those who used to engage in purchase and sale, "*seeking of the bounty of Allah*" (73:20), but whenever they heard the call to prayer they would immediately drop what they had at hand and would go to the mosque to pray.[2]

(16) Concerning verse 24:39 (*and Allah is quick in reckoning*) it is narrated that once Imam ʿAlī was asked, "How does He [God] do their reckoning all at once?" He replied, "As He gives their sustenance all at once."[3]

(17) 17. The Messenger of God said: God has made the clouds a sieve for rain. They melt the hail until it turns into water, so that it would not harm the things that it hits. The hail and thunderbolts that you see are God's punishments that He strikes upon whomever He wills, and diverts from whomever He wills among His servants.[4]

(18) 18. Concerning "*of them is that which walks upon its belly, and of them is that which walks upon two feet, and of them is that which walks upon four*" (24:45) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "*upon two feet*" refers to humankind; "*upon its belly*" refers to the snakes; and "*upon four*" refers to the beasts. Imam al-Ṣādiq said, "And some of them walk on more than that."

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh and others, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah and Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

4 *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Masʿadat b. Ṣadaqah, from Imam al-Ṣādiq, from his father, from Imam ʿAlī.

Verses 47-57

These verses discuss the following points: (1) It is obligatory to obey God's Messenger. (2) Obeying him is inseparable from obeying God. (3) It is incumbent to refer to his judgment and decree. (4) Turning away from him is a sign of hypocrisy. The verses end by giving a good promise to the believers, and threatening the disbelievers.

وَ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَ بِالرَّسُولِ وَ أَطَعْنا ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّى فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذلِكَ وَ ما أُولئِكَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(24:47) ***And they say: We believe in Allah and in the Messenger and we obey; then a party of them turn back after this, and these are not believers.***

This verse describes the state of some hypocrites, who first declared that they are believers and are obedient, but then they defected. "Belief in God" is to accept His unity and the religion that He has legislated. "Belief in the Messenger" is to accept that he is sent from God, that his commands and prohibitions are the commands and prohibitions of God, and that his judgment is God's judgment, without anything of himself. "Obeying God" is to act according to what He has legislated and prescribed. "Obeying the Messenger" is to do what he has commanded, to refrain from what he has prohibited, and to accept his rulings and judgments.

Thus, "believing in God and obeying Him" pertain to the religion itself and being committed to it, while "believing in the Messenger and obeying him" pertain to what the Messenger informs us about the religion in the sense that he is the informant, as well as what he rules and judges in disputes. One must comply with him in all of that.

Therefore, the two forms of belief and obedience differ in terms of the breadth of their applications. The verse indicates this multiplicity [of belief and obedience] by differentiating between them, as it says, "*We believe in Allah and in the Messenger*," instead of dropping the letter *bāʾ* in *bil-rasūl* [that is, instead of saying "We believe in God and the Messenger" without saying "in" before "the Messenger"]. Nevertheless, the two beliefs are not separable from one another. He says [reprovingly]: *And (those who) desire to make a distinction between Allah and His messengers* (4:150).

… We believe in Allah and in the Messenger and we obey…: It means:

We have tied our hearts to God's religion and have committed ourselves to it, and to the fact that the Messenger only says the truth and judges by the truth.

… then a party of them turn back after this…: That is, some of these people—who claim that "*We believe in Allah and in the Messenger and we obey*"—deviate from the implications of their speech after saying it.

… and these are not believers: That is, those who make the above claim are disbelievers. The demonstrative pronoun "these" refers to all of those who made the above claim, not just those who turn back, because the theme and context suggests a rebuke of them all.

وَ إِذا دُعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَ رَسُولِهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ إِذا فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(24:48) ***And when they are called to Allah and His Messenger that he may judge between them, lo, a party of them turn aside.***

The theme and tone of the verse suggests that these verses were revealed about a certain hypocrite who was referred to the Prophet's judgment in some dispute that had occurred between him and someone else, but he refused to consult the Prophet. The verse was therefore revealed about him.

The Prophet's judgment among the people was only based on God's rule and according to what God revealed to him, as He says: *Surely We have revealed the Book to you with the truth that you may judge between people by means of that which Allah has shown you* (4:105). Therefore, in addition to being directly attributable to him, the Prophet's judgments are also attributable to God, in the sense that his judgements were made in the light of God's law and His appointment of the Prophet for judgment and ruling.

Given the above explanation, being "*called to Allah*" means being told to follow what God's religion necessitates with respect to the case of the dispute, while being "*called to His Messenger that he may judge between them*" means being told to follow what the Prophet directly rules. Apparently, the pronoun "he" in *"that he may judge between them*" refers to the Messenger [not God]. A single pronoun ["he," instead of "they" in dual form] is used here to show that the Messenger's judgment is the same as God's judgment.

The relationship between this verse and the last one is that of a particular to a universal. This verse describes a specific case of aversion [from the judgment of God's Messenger] while the aversion mentioned in the last verse was absolute and unconditional, referring to the disbelievers in general.

وَ إِنْ يَكُنْ لَهُمُ الْحَقُّ يَأْتُوا إِلَيْهِ مُذْعِنِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(24:49) ***And if the truth be on their side, they come to him quickly,***

obedient (mudhᶜinīn, from idhᶜān).

Idhᶜān is synonymous with *inqiyād* (obedience, compliance). The phrase "*they come to him*" suggests that "the truth" in this verse refers to the Messenger's judgment. This also matches the context of the verse. The Prophet's judgment is "the truth" in the sense that it is never separable from truth, because he always judges according to the truth. The meaning of the verse is: "If the truth—which is the Messenger's judgment—is in their favor and not against them, then they would go obediently toward his judgment. Thus, their aversion from his rule is because of it being against them and not in their favor." The implication of this is that they are followers of their desires instead of the truth.

أَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ أَمِ ارْتابُوا أَمْ يَخافُونَ أَنْ يَحِيفَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَ رَسُولُهُ بَلْ أُولئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(24:50) *Is there in their hearts a disease, or are they in doubt* (irtābū, from irtiyāb)*, or do they fear that Allah and His Messenger will be unjust* (yaḥīfa, from ḥayf) *toward them? Nay! They themselves are the unjust.*

Ḥayf means *jawr* (injustice, oppression, wrong). The context of the verses suggests that "the heart's disease" here means "weakness of faith," which is also what is meant in many other verses. For example: *Be not soft in (your) speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease may desire* (33:32), and: *If the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease and the agitators in the city do not desist, We shall most certainly set you over them* (33:60).

Some exegetes have said that "the heart's disease" here means "hypocrisy." However, this cannot be true because their hypocrisy was already stated at the beginning of these verses: *and these are not believers* (24:47). Therefore, it does not make sense to ask whether they are hypocrites [by saying "*Is there in their hearts a disease…?*"], and then make a transition from that by saying: *Nay! They themselves are the unjust.*

Irtiyāb means *shakk* (doubt, uncertainty). Since it is mentioned unconditionally, it apparently includes having any doubts in religion after believing in it. The meaning should not be confined to only having doubts in the Prophet's qualification for judgment, having doubts in his justice, or other similar doubts, because such restriction of meaning would inherently call for some sign and evidence [in the text or context of the verse].

… or do they fear that Allah and His Messenger will be unjust toward

them?: Turning away from the Prophet's judgment according to God's religion implies either of two things: (1) the divine law which the Prophet follows in his judgment is unjust and fails to pay the due right of each side; and/or (2) the Prophet does not observe the truth and rights in his judgment. That is why the verse is effectively saying: "Or is it that they turn aside from the Prophet's judgment because they fear that God and His Messenger may wrong them?" Referring to the rule of a judge can only be scary if there is a possibility that he may be unjust in his rule and may deviate from the truth to falsehood. However, there is no such likelihood in the rule of God and His Messenger. That is why there is no room for such fear.

… Nay* (bal)*! They themselves are the unjust: The word *bal* (nay, rather) shows a transition to a final conclusion that replaces the previous three possibilities. It means that their aversion is not due to having a doubt or a disease in their hearts [the first two possibilities], because if that were the case, then they should not have ever gone to the Prophet obediently, even in cases when his judgment was in their favor. Rather, they would have turned away from his rule regardless of it being for them or against them. Also, there is no reason to fear being wronged by God and His Messenger [the third possibility], because God and His Messenger are free from injustice. Therefore, the only cause for their behavior—of refusing to refer to the judgment of God and His Messenger—is that *they* are unjust.

Given the above explanations, the three factors mentioned as possible causes for their aversion are exhaustive and mutually exclusive, stating three causes other than hypocrisy. The verse is effectively saying that they are hypocrites and not true believers, because otherwise their aversion would have been due to one of three things: (1) their weakness of faith; (2) their loss of belief because of doubt; or (3) an unwarranted fear.

Therefore, "injustice" here apparently means "hypocrisy." It is called injustice in the sense that the person violates the conditions and implications of *īmān* (belief, faith) in practice, in spite of admitting it verbally. This is what we also saw above: *and these are not believers* (24:47). It could also be that "injustice" here specifically refers to being unjust with respect to non-financial rights [as opposed to *all* rights]. It cannot mean injustice in its absolute and unconditional sense, because that would include the previous three possibilities, and therefore stating "*they themselves are the unjust*" as a substitute for them would not be correct.

The exegetes have had extended discussions about the possibilities and the transition in the verse, however, what we mentioned above should be sufficient. Those who want to read more than this should refer to the

elaborate books of *tafsīr*.[1]

إِنَّما كانَ قَوْلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذا دُعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَ رَسُولِهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ يَقُولُوا سَمِعْنا وَ أَطَعْنا وَ أُولئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

(24:51) ***The response of the believers, when they are invited to Allah and His Messenger that he may judge between them, is ever*** **(kāna)** ***only to say: We hear and we obey; and those are the successful.***

This verse describes one of the necessary consequences and implications of *īmān* (belief, faith). This is inferred from the use of the attribute "believers" in the verse, as well as the explicit mention of the verb *kāna* (lit. "was, has been, is") where it says: *The response of the believers…is ever* (kāna) *only to say*.[2] Belief in God and His Messenger means the heart's commitment to follow what God and His Messenger decree. Its practical implication is to respond positively when one is called to the judgment of God and His Messenger, as opposed to rejecting the call.

"Invitation" in this verse—where it says, "*when they are invited to Allah*

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1 The author's discussion in the above four paragraphs is entirely centered on the word *bal* (nay, rather), which shows that what follows this term is an *alternative* which *replaces* what was said before it. The author has applied this substitution to *all* three points mentioned before this term. However, it could be that it only applies to the last point (*or do they fear that Allah and His Messenger will be unjust toward them?*). In such cases, the application of the alternative to the last point is certain (*mutayaqqan*), while its application to more distant points is speculative: it cannot be taken for granted, but it needs proof and evidence. The most apparent and primary meaning—especially given the synonymy between *ẓulm* and *ḥayf*—is that the last part of the verse is only meant as a clarification for the previous point. This is in line with the Qur'an's language when presenting an erroneous belief, especially one that contravenes God's sanctity. In such cases, the Qur'an often interjects an aside or parenthetical remark right away to clarify that error, and then continues the previous discussion. In this case, the verse is saying that God and His Messenger are free from *ḥayf* (injustice, oppression) but they themselves are characterized by *ẓulm* (injustice, oppression). Therefore, the last part of the verse does not reject the first two possibilities, and hence we can maintain the apparent unconditional sense of it, which suggests that "being unjust" includes "having disease in the heart" and "having doubts in religion." (Trans.)

2 The meaning would have been complete even without saying *kāna*. Its explicit mention here shows that this is an ongoing and inseparable feature of belief in God and His Messenger. (Trans.)

and His Messenger that he may judge between them"—refers to one side of a disagreement inviting and asking the other side to refer to God and His Messenger to settle their dispute. This interpretation is deduced from the word *idhā* (when), at the beginning of the phrase. This "invitation" in the verse cannot refer to the call of God and His Messenger, meaning the religious order that the believers must refer to the rule of God and His Messenger in their disputes, because that is an eternal law and is not limited to any particular time [indicated by "when"].

Some exegetes have said that the subject of "*when they are invited*" is God and His Messenger, meaning: When God and His Messenger call them… However, our explanation above should clarify the problem with this view. Nevertheless, the call and invitation of others [to the judgment of God and His Messenger] ultimately traces to the call of God and His Messenger.

Either way, the verse is saying that whenever the believers are called to the ruling of God and His Messenger, their response is only: *We hear and we obey*. They always give ear to and obey the divine call, which, in this verse, can be interpreted in three ways: (1) It refers to when one side of the dispute calls the other side to refer to the ruling of God and His Messenger. (2) It is refers to the command of God and His Messenger to refer to their ruling. (3) It means that they hear and submit to the ruling of God and His Messenger—albeit this possibility is unlikely.[1]

Restricting the response of the believers to "*We hear and we obey*" implies that they never reject such a call. Rejecting this call would be stepping out of the boundaries of belief, which was the message of "*Nay! They themselves are the unjust*" (24:50), as we discussed above. Therefore, this verse is an explanation and justification for the final transition in the last verse.

The verse ends by saying: *and those are the successful*. This means that success is only for them, not that they only have success.

وَ مَنْ يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَ رَسُولَهُ وَ يَخْشَ اللَّهَ وَ يَتَّقْهِ فَأُولٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفائِزُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(24:52) *And he who obeys Allah and His Messenger, and fears Allah, and is careful of (his duty to) Him, these it is that are the felicitous* (al-fāʾizūna, from fawz).

Fawz (felicity, happiness) is the same as *falāḥ* (salvation, success,

1 In the last possibility there is no element of invitation or calling, but only the ruling. It is unlikely because it is not consonant with the wording of the verse. (Trans.)

deliverance).[1] Given the context of the previous verses, this verse serves as a proof and rationale—like a universal—for the last verse. The last attributed success to those who are believers, and who respond positively when they are called to the ruling of God and His Messenger. Then, it is as if this verse is providing the following syllogism in order to prove that:

If one accepts the ruling of God and His Messenger while being a true believer, it means that he obeys God and His Messenger, is fearful of God inwardly, and is conscious of Him outwardly.

If one obeys God and His Messenger in their judgments, and is fearful and conscious of God, then he is felicitous.

Thus, these believers [who accept the ruling of God and His Messenger] are felicitous, meaning successful.

This verse applies to both sides of the dispute, including the caller and the called. It describes those who invite others to the ruling of God and His Messenger, as well as those who respond positively to this call. Hence, in addition to explaining and justifying the previous verse, it generalizes the good promise [of success and felicity] to both the caller and the called.

وَ أَقْسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ جَهْدَ أَيْمانِهِمْ لَئِنْ أَمَرْتَهُمْ لَيَخْرُجُنَّ قُلْ لا تُقْسِمُوا طاعَةٌ مَعْرُوفَةٌ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِما تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(24:53) ***And they swear by Allah with the most energetic* (jahd)** ***of their oaths* (aymānihim)** ***that if you command them they would certainly go forth. Say: Swear not; (it is) known obedience; surely Allah is aware of what you do.***

Jahd means *ṭāqah* (ability, capacity, effort). *Jahda aymānihim* means "the heaviest and strongest of their vows." The meaning is: "They swear by God to the extent and utmost degree of their effort and ability," where a word like *mablagh* (extent, the utmost degree) is implied in the verse.

Apparently, "going forth" means leaving [their homes and/or Medina] for jihad, as used in several other verses, such as: *And if they had intended*

1 There is a slight difference between *fawz* and *falāḥ*, where the former has a positive meaning while the latter has a negative meaning. *Fawz* means making a gain, while *falāḥ* means avoiding a loss. *Fawz* means winning a goal or pleasure that is desired, while *falāḥ* means being spared from an evil or pain that is feared. Therefore, *fawz* can be translated as "triumph, felicity, happiness," and *falāḥ* can be translated as "salvation, deliverance, saving." Both of them are forms of "success," and one can include the other by implication. (Trans.)

to go forth, they would certainly have provided equipment for it, but Allah did not like their going forth, so He withheld them, and it was said (to them): Hold back with those who hold back. Had they gone forth with you, they would not have added to you aught save corruption (9:46-47).

… Say: Swear not…: They are prohibited from swearing.

***… known obedience* (ṭāʿah maʿrūfah)…:** This is a predicate for an omitted subject, which is a pronoun that refers to "going forth."[1] This statement ["*(it is) known obedience*"] is mentioned to explain and justify the previous prohibition: *Swear not*. That is why there is no conjunction [such as "and" (*wāw*) or "so" (the letter *fāʾ*)] between these two parts of the verse. This explanation and justification is further complemented by saying: *surely Allah is aware of what you do*.

The meaning of the verse is: They swear to God by their most emphatic vows that if you order them to leave for jihad, they would go forth. But tell them not to swear, because leaving for jihad is a known act of obedience in the religion [of Islam]. It is already something obligatory, so you do not need to make it incumbent upon yourselves by emphatic oaths. And if you are making these oaths in order to satisfy God and His Messengers, then God is well aware of what you do; He is not deceived by how much you stress your vows.

Some exegetes have said: "Going forth" means handing over their homes and possessions if the Messengers judges so. *Ṭāʿah maʿrūfah* means "good and honorable obedience."[2] It is a subject for an omitted predicate which is implied: "honorable obedience to the Prophet is better than your oaths." Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: They swear to God by their most emphatic vows that if you rule in their disputes that they should let go of their homes and possessions, they would do so. Tell them: "Do not to swear, because your good obedience of the Prophet is better than your vows by God, and God is well aware of what you do."

This interpretation better connects to the previous verse than our suggested interpretation. However, the problem with it is that it does not comply with what was explicitly mentioned above, that they reject "*when they are invited to Allah and His Messenger that he may judge between them*" (24:51). Since it was already said that they turn aside and deviate from the ruling of God and His Messenger, it does not make sense that they swear to leave their homes and possessions if the Prophet orders them to do so in his ruling

1 Therefore, the implied meaning of this part is: Do not swear because going forth is a known act of obedience (Trans.).

2 One of the meanings of *maʿrūf* (lit. "known") is "good." (Trans.)

and judgment. That is obvious. The only other possibility is that "those who swear" [that is, the subject in this verse] are different from "those who reject the call and turn aside from the ruling." However, in that case there would be no evidence to warrant the interpretation of "going forth" as this meaning [of submitting one's home and possessions].[1]

قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّما عَلَيْهِ ما حُمِّلَ وَ عَلَيْكُمْ
ما حُمِّلْتُمْ وَ إِنْ تُطِيعُوهُ تَهْتَدُوا وَ ما عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلاَّ الْبَلاغُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿٥٤﴾

(24:54) ***Say: Obey Allah and obey the Messenger; but if you turn back, then on him rests that which is imposed on him and on you rests that which is imposed on you; and if you obey him, you will be guided; and nothing rests on the Messenger but clear delivering (of the message).***

This verse orders the audience to obey God in the religion that He has sent down, and to obey the Messenger in what he has brought to the people from God, as well as in his commands with regards to any matter, whether religious or worldly. Starting the verse by "say" indicates that all obedience is due to God. This idea is then reasserted by saying, "*obey the Messenger*" instead of "obey Me" because obeying a person as a "messenger" is the same as obeying the one who has sent him. This completes the argument.[2] That is why the verse continues to say three things:

(1) *But if you turn back, then on him rests that which is imposed on him and on you rests that which is imposed on you*. That is: If you turn away and refrain from obeying the Messenger, it will not harm the Messenger, because he is only responsible for what he has been charged with, and you are only responsible for what you have been charged with. What is imposed on each of you does not touch the other side, for all obedience is due to God.

(2) *And if you obey him, you will be guided.* That is: Even though each of you is responsible for what has been imposed on you, if you obey the Messenger, you will be guided. This is because what he has brought to you is a message from God, and what he orders you to do is by God's command. Therefore, if you obey him, you are obeying God, and guidance rests in

1 In other words, the suggested meaning here is particular and specific, while "going forth" in the verse is universal and unconditional. (Trans.)

2 "Say" indicates that even the Messenger is subject to following God's orders. The argument here shows why one should obey the Messenger: because of his attribute of being a *messenger*. (Trans.)

obeying God.

(3) *And nothing rests on the Messenger but clear delivering (of the message).* This sentence serves as an explanation and justification for the previous two points. What is imposed on the Messenger is only to deliver the message. Hence, he bears no blame if you deviate from his message. Also, since he is a messenger who only delivers a message, it follows that obeying him is equal to obeying his Sender, and there is guidance in obeying his Sender (that is, God, swt).

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَ عَمِلُوا الصَّالِحاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَ لَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضى لَهُمْ وَ لَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْناً يَعْبُدُونَنِي لا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئاً وَ مَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذلِكَ فَأُولئِكَ هُمُ الْفاسِقُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(24:55) ***Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them successors in the land as He made successors those before them, and that He will most certainly establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and that He will most certainly, after their fear, give them security in exchange; they shall serve Me, not associating aught with Me; and whoever is ungrateful after that, they are the transgressors.***

This verse was apparently revealed in Medina, not in Mecca before the migration, because it appears in a Medinite chapter. This is confirmed by the tone of the verse, and especially by its subsequent part. Given this, the verse offers a good promise to those who believe and do righteous deeds, saying that God shall soon bless them with a righteous society that is exclusive to them. He shall make them successors in the land, establish their religion for them, and exchange their fear for security. As a result, they will not fear the plot of the hypocrites or the obstructions of the disbelievers; thus they will worship God without associating anything with Me.

Allah has promised to those of you* (minkum) *who believe and do good…: This statement addresses all Muslims universally, including both the hypocrites and the believers, including those who do good deeds and those who do not. Then, the particle *min* (lit. "of") in *minkum* is partitive, not descriptive, meaning that the verse's promise is specifically for those individuals among the Muslims who believe and do good deeds, but not others.

… that He will most certainly make them successors

(la-yastakhlifannahum, from istikhlāf) ***in the land as He made successors those before them…:*** There are two possibilities for the meaning of *istikhlāf* here:

(1) It means giving them divine *khilāfah* (caliphate, vicegerency, vicariate), as used in the stories of Adam, David and Solomon, where God says: *I am going to place in the land a khalīfah* (2:30), *O David ! Surely We have made you a khalifah in the land* (38:26), and: *And Solomon inherited David* (27:16). Given this meaning, "*those before them*" would be the previous prophets and saints who were vicegerents and representatives of God. However, this meaning is unlikely, as we shall explain below.

(2) It means making a group of people inherit the land and giving them authority and dominion over it after another group, as He says: *Surely the land is Allah's; He causes such of His servants to inherit it as He will, and the end is for those who guard (against evil)* (7:128), and: *(As for) the land, My righteous servants shall inherit it* (21:105). Given this meaning, "*those before them*" would be the believers among the nations of the previous prophets such as the people of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shuʿayb (Jethro, Reuel). God obliterated the disbelievers and evildoers among them, but He saved their pure believers. He describes them collectively as follows: *And those who disbelieved said to their messengers: We will most certainly drive you forth from our land, or else you shall come back into our religion. So their Lord revealed to them: Most certainly We will destroy the unjust. And most certainly We will settle you in the land after them; this is for him who fears standing in My presence and who fears My threat* (14:13-14). They were those who subscribed to God alone, and thus He rescued them. Then they formed righteous societies and lived there, until "*time took its toll on them and so their hearts were hardened*" [57:16].

Some exegetes have said that "those who were made successors before them" refers to the Israelites. When God killed Pharaoh and his hosts, he made the Israelites inherit the lands of Egypt and the Levant, and He established them there, as He says about them: *And We desired to bestow a favor upon those who were deemed weak in the land, and to make them the Imams, and to make them the heirs, and to grant them power in the land* (28:5-6).

The problem with this view is that the society of Israelites that was formed after their delivery from Pharaoh and his hosts was not free from disbelief, hypocrisy and iniquity. It was not purely composed of those who believe and do righteous deeds. According to the explicit text of the Noble Qur'an in several verses, such a society—composed of only believers who do righteous deeds—has never existed. Therefore, there is no connection between giving succession to those who believe and do righteous deeds, and

the succession of the Israelites, because the latter were not composed of righteous people alone, but they were mixed with disbelievers, hypocrites and evildoers.

One may say that the comparison is only concerned with their very succession, where the succession of the believers is compared to the succession of the Israelites as a case of those who were before, regardless of *how* they were. However, if that were the purpose, then there is no reason to confine the comparison to the Israeli societies, because there were much stronger and more populated people during the time of revelation and before that [who would have been a better match for such comparison]. For example, there were the Romans, the Persians, the Chaldeans and others. Similarly, God says concerning [the tribes] ʿĀd and Thamūd: *And remember when He made you successors after Noah's people* (7:69), and: *And remember when He made you successors after ʿĀd* (7:74). He also addresses the disbelievers in this nation [of Prophet Muḥammad]: *And He it is Who has made you successors in the land* (6:165), and: *He it is Who made you successors in the land* (35:39).

You might say: Perhaps the verse is first making a comparison with the Israelites, then it amends the comparison for the intended righteous society by adding: *and that He will most certainly establish for them their religion…* Is there anything wrong with this?

The answer is: That is fine [to interpret a part of the verse as a clarification and elaboration], but then there would be no reason to restrict the comparison to the succession of the Israelites alone, as we stated above.

… He will most certainly establish* (la-yumakkinanna, from tamkīn) *for them their religion which He has approved for them…: *Tamkīn* is "to make something fixed, firm and established in a place (*makān*)." It is a metaphorical expression for stability without loss, agitation or shaking, in which case the fixed object can function properly and effectively, without being obstructed or prevented by anything. The establishment (*tamakkun*) of a religion would be a situation where the religion is practiced across the society, without it being denied or disparaged. It is when its principle teachings are adopted without any disagreement or dispute. God states in several places in His Book that disagreement in religion is a result of transgression; for example: *And none but the very people who were given it [the Scripture] differed about it after clear arguments had come to them, revolting among themselves* (2:213).

The religion "*which He has approved for them*" is the religion of submission (*islām*). It is ascribed to them [by saying "their religion"] because of two points: (1) in order to honor them; and (2) in order to show that this religion it is what they need and call for by their innate human nature (*fiṭrah*).

… and that He will most certainly, after their fear, give them security in exchange…: The conjunction "and" joins this sentence to: *He will most certainly make them successors*. The same holds for the conjunction in the previous statement: *and that He will most certainly establish for them*. The verse literally says "He will exchange them" (*la-yubaddilannahum*), meaning that *they* will be exchanged. There are a few possible explanations for this usage: (1) It is a metaphorical expression.[1] (2) It involves an omission that is implied by "*after their fear*." The implied meaning would be: He will exchange their fear. (3) "Security" (*amn*) here means "secure" (*āmmīn*, in plural).[2] Either way, "fear" refers to the difficulties that were inflicted upon the believers in the early years of Islam by the disbelievers and hypocrites.

… they shall serve Me, not associating aught with Me…: Given the theme of the verse, it is most appropriate to interpret this expression as an adverbial clause, implying the conjunction "while" at its beginning. In other words, this sentence describes the state and condition (*ḥāl*) of the pronoun "them" in "*give them security*." The meaning is: He will exchange their fear for security, *while* they will worship Me, not associating anything with Me.

This expression implies an absolute negation of *shirk* (polytheism, associating others with God) altogether, because of the following points: (1) It involves a transition from the third person to the first person [from "*He will*" to "*serve Me*" and "*with Me*"]. (2) It emphasizes "*serve Me*" by adding "*not associating aught with Me*." (3) It involves the use of indefinite (*nakirah*) in a negative expression.[3]

All of these emphases show that the believers serve and worship God sincerely and without any apparent or hidden association. In short, God will change their society to a secure one, where God is worshiped alone and no one else is adopted as a lord.

… and whoever is ungrateful* (kafara) *after that* (dhālika)*, they are the transgressors* (al-fāsiqūn, from fisq)*: *Fisq* (iniquity, evildoing, transgression) means "stepping out of the boundaries of servitude." Apparently, the demonstrative pronoun "that" (*dhālika*) refers to what is promised [that is, the establishment of the righteous society]. Given this, it would be most appropriate to interpret *kafara* as a verb that is derived from *kufrān*

1 That is, the verse does not literally mean that *they* will be exchanged, but it is a way of saying that their state of fear will be exchanged for security. (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: He will change them to be secure after their fear. (Trans.)

3 "*Not associating aught with Me*" is a negative expression, and *shayʾan* (aught, anything) is in the indefinite from. Such usage implies a universal negation, meaning: Not associating with Me anything whatsoever. (Trans.)

(ingratitude, ungratefulness), which is the opposite of *shukr* (gratitude, gratefulness) [as opposed to being derived from *kufr*, meaning disbelief]. The meaning is: After the fulfilment of this promise, those who are ungrateful to God—through their denial, hypocrisy or other heinous sins—are perfect in transgression.

The exegetes have disagreed very much over this verse. Some have said: The verse refers to the Companions of the Prophet. God fulfilled His promise—of making them successors in the land, establishing their religion for them, and exchanging their fear for security—by making Islam victorious after the death of the Prophet during the time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (al-Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidīn). The word *istikhlāf* (giving succession, making inheritors, replacement) here refers to the succession of the four caliphs after the Prophet, or the succession of the first three of them. It is attributed to *all* the Companions, even though only a *few* of them were inheritors, based on attributing the properties of a part to the whole. For example, sometimes when a person from tribe X is murdered it is said, "Tribe X was murdered."

Some have said: The verse refers to the entire nation of Muḥammad. "Giving them succession" refers to making them inherit the land, as God gave the land in inheritance to their previous nations. According to some, it refers to the succession of the caliphs who came after the Prophet. "Establishing their religion and exchanging their fear for security" refer to the establishment and stability of Islam, and the defeat of the enemies of religion. God fulfilled His promise by helping Islam and the Muslims after the Prophet's death. As a result, many cities they gained, and over many lands they reigned.

According to both of the above interpretations, the verse would be among the future predictions of the Qur'an, forecasting an event before its occurrence.

Some have said: The verse refers to the promised Mahdi, who will fill the land with justice and equity after it is filled with injustice and inequity, as mentioned in *mutawātir* (repeatedly reported, mass-transmitted) narrations. Those "*who believe and do good*" are the Prophet and the Imams of his Household (Ahl al-Bayt).

However, what can be understood from the tone and theme of this noble verse—given our discussions above, and keeping away from the neglectful and compromising views that certain exegetes have fallen into—is that the promise in this verse pertains to only a subset of the Muslim community (ummah), not to all of them, and not to any specific individuals among them. The subset of Muslims that is explicitly mentioned in the verse is: *those who believe and do good*. Beyond that, there is no indication in the text of the

verse, nor in any rational evidence, saying that these are the Companions, the Prophet, or the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt. There is also no evidence for the view that "*those who believe and do good*" include the entire ummah, and the emphasis on a specific group of them is only to show them a special regard and honor. All of these are unwarranted impositions on the verse.

What is meant by *istikhlāf* (succession, inheritance)—in "*He will most certainly make them successors in the land as He made successors those before them*"—is the formation of a righteous and faithful society from them, which will inherit the land as the previous powerful and strong nations inherited it. The fulfilment of this succession will depend on the righteousness of their society collectively, not on the righteousness of any specific person individually, just as it was the case with "those before them."

We also mentioned the possibility that *istikhlāf* here means divine kingdom or *khilāfah* (caliphate, vicegerency, vicariate), as used in the stories of David, Solomon and Joseph. However, it is unlikely that the verse refers to the holy prophets of God as "*those before them*." This expression, and other similar expressions in meaning, have appeared more than fifty times in the Qur'an, but none of them refer to the previous prophets, despite their frequent mention in the Qur'an. Instead, God refers to them with expressions like "*messengers before you*" (3:184) or "*messengers before me*" (3:183), where the pronoun refers to the Prophet [not the Muslims or believers].

The "establishment" (*tamkīn*) of their religion refers to the stability of the religion on its stem, such that it is neither shaken by their disagreement over its roots, nor by their negligence in executing its laws and practicing its branches [that is, injunctions]. Their society shall be free from the defilement of hypocrisy, as we discussed above.

"Exchanging their fear for security" means the spread of peace and security through their society, such that they fear no enemy whatsoever; whether internally or externally, whether overt or covert, and whether concerning their religious affairs or concerning their worldly well-being.

One exegete has said: It means that they will have no fear of external enemies from outside their society, unlike the Muslims [at the onset of Islam] who were afraid of the disbelievers and polytheists who wanted to put down the light of God and efface the call of religion.

The problem with this interpretation is that it involves an unwarranted qualification of the meaning which contravenes the unconditional wording of the verse, without any evidence to support such qualification. Moreover, the verse has a tone of showing God's grace and favor (*imtinān*). How is that compatible with promising a society which is merely secure from external enemies, but not necessarily secure internally? Given the interpretation

above, this society could be filled by corruption and disaster from within; where individuals do not feel secure about their life, honor or property; where only the ruling government has freedom; and where only the extravagant transgressors prosper.

"Serving God without associating anything with Him" is meant in the true sense of these words. It means that God alone shall be served and worshiped with sincerity throughout the entire society. It means the obliteration of every distinction and advantage other than *taqwā* (God-fear, piety, God-wariness).

The gist of all the above points is: God has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds among the Muslims that He will form a righteous society out of them that will be free from the defilement of disbelief, hypocrisy and evildoing. They will inherit the land, where the beliefs and practices of its members will be governed only by the true religion. They will live in security, without fear of any enemy within or without, free from the schemes of the plotters, the injustice of the oppressors, and the tyranny of the tyrants.

Such a pure and perfect society, with these excellent and holy qualities, has not occurred ever since the time of the Prophet. If it were to be fulfilled by any society, it would only match the time of the appearance of the Mahdi, as described in *mutawātir* (repeatedly reported, mass-transmitted) narrations from the Prophet and the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt. However, the verse would refer to the righteous society [at that time], and not to him alone.

One may object: What is the point of revealing this verse at a time when neither the Mahdi, nor any of those with him were alive? How does this promise encourage "*those who believe and do good*" among the audience [at the time of revelation]?

The answer is: This objection is based on confusing individual and collective addresses. Some speeches are directed at individuals, intending those specific individuals in particular. Some other speeches are directed at individuals, but in the sense that they exhibit certain qualities. In the first type of address, the promise, threat or any other message in the speech does not go beyond those specific individuals. In the second type of address, the message would also be applicable to anyone who demonstrates the mentioned qualities in the speech. The address in this verse is of the second type, as we discussed above.

This is the type of address in most of Qur'anic speeches that are directed at both believers and disbelievers. It is in this sense that the Qur'an rebukes the People of the Book, particularly the Jews, for what their predecessors did, and censures the polytheists for the actions of their fathers [because they had the same qualities].

Another specific example of this address is the following promise of God: "*So when the second promise came that they may bring you to grief*" (17:7), because the audience of this promise did not live to see its fulfilment. Another example is what God narrates from Dhū al-Qarnayn: *But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass He will make it level with the ground, and the promise of my Lord is ever true* (18:98). Likewise is His promise of the Hour [that is, the Resurrection], where the carpet of worldly life shall be rolled up by the blow of the Trumpet, as He says: *It will be momentous in the heavens and the earth; it will not come on you but of a sudden* (7:187). Thus this verse [24:55] gives a promise to righteous believers, in the sense that they are righteous believers. None of those who were alive at the time of revelation of the verse would live to witness the fulfilment of this promise, but there is no problem with that as long as there will be some members of such a society with the same qualities to observe its fulfilment.

Given the above, if we want to give due justice to the verse, it would only match the promised society that will be formed after the appearance of the Mahdi. However, if we interpret its terms and phrases loosely and not literally, then "the succession of those who believe and do good among them" could refer to the succession of the entire Muslim nation (ummah), justified by some form of generalization (*taghlīb*) or other similar considerations.

Based on this loose and broader interpretation, "the establishment of the religion that God has approved for them" would refer to being known in the world as Muslims. It means that Islam is counted as their religion formally, even though they may be divided into 73 denominations, where some of them declare others as heretics and do not see them entitled to life, honor and property. "The exchange of their fear for security, where they worship God without associating anything with Him" would refer to the victory and dominance of Islam in the world, its spread across most of the inhabited lands, and the performance of apparent rituals like prayer, fasting and pilgrimage. Again, this would only describe the appearance; otherwise, they may have no security within themselves, and truth and rights may have departed from amongst them. Overall, those who are promised would be the entire Muslim nation, and their succession would be the victory and dominance that God bestowed upon them gradually after the Prophet's migration, which continued after his death.

Even based on this interpretation we cannot limit the verse to the time of the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs. Rather, the verse's promise would apply to the subsequent times until the fall of the Islamic caliphate [in 13th century CE]. Similarly, there are no grounds for saying that the verse is only about the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs [individually], the first three

of them, or only ʿAlī.

وَ أَقِيمُوا الصَّلاةَ وَ آتُوا الزَّكاةَ وَ أَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(24:56) ***And keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and obey the Messenger, so that mercy may be shown to you.***

This verse complements the previous verses, because its content is similar to the theme and context of the above.

And keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate…: This is equivalent to commanding the readers to obey God in what He has legislated for His servants. The specific mention of prayer and the poor-rate is because they are two of the major pillars in religious duties. Prayer and poor-rate represent duty to God and duty to the people, respectively.

… and obey the Messenger…: This refers to the Prophet's authority in judicial and governmental matters.

… so that mercy may be shown to you: This expression justifies the verse's command by referring to the welfare and benefit that it involves. The meaning deduced from the context is: Obey God and obey the Messenger, because by these two forms of obedience it is hoped that God's mercy may cover you. In other words, if you obey God and the Messenger, God He will fulfil His promise for you, or He will hasten its fulfilment for you.

If hypocrisy is lifted from among the Muslims, if they all become righteous, and if they unitedly support the message of truth, then that would be a key to the formation of a righteous society that will shower every good upon them.

لا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مُعْجِزِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَ مَأْواهُمُ النَّارُ وَ لَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٥٧﴾

(24:57) ***Think not that those who disbelieve shall escape in the land, and their abode is the fire, and certainly evil is the resort!***

This verse complements the previous verses. It emphasizes the above promise of succession in the land, establishment of religion, and exchange of fear for security.

God addresses His Prophet with an emphatic address, that he should not think that the disbelievers can render God defeated and weak. They should not suppose that they can ever prevent God from fulfilling His promise because of their power and strength. This is particularly a good news to the Prophet, because it assures him of God's grace upon his nation, and the

defeat and domination of his enemies. That is why the verse addresses him exclusively in second person singular.

The first part of the verse is a prohibition [in the imperative form], but it is equivalent to a negative statement [in the declarative mood], implying that the disbelievers will cease to oppose the religion. That is why it is then complemented by "*and their abode is the fire…*" [in a declarative form]. The verse is effectively saying: They shall be defeated in this world, and their abode in the hereafter shall be the fire, which is an evil resort.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning "*And they say: We believe in Allah…*" (24:47ff) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: It is said that these verses were revealed about one of the hypocrites who had a dispute with a Jewish man. The Jew invited the hypocrite to the Messenger of God (s.w.a.) [for judgment], but the hypocrite invited the Jew to Kaʿb b. al-Ashraf [a prominent Jew in Medina].

Al-Balkhī says: Once there was a dispute between ʿAlī and ʿUthmān. ʿUthmān had purchased a land from ʿAlī, but then he found some rocks coming out of it, and so he decided to return the land on the account of having a flaw. ʿAlī refused to take it back and said, "Let the Messenger of God judge between me and you." Then al-Ḥakam b. Abī al-ʿĀṣ said [to ʿUthmān], "Don't set him [the Prophet] as your judge, because if you take this case to him, then he will judge in favor of his cousin [ʿAlī]."[1] That is when these verses were revealed. This, or a similar account to it, has been narrated from Imam al-Bāqir.

Author's comment: It is narrated from al-Ḍaḥḥāk that the dispute was between ʿAlī and al-Mughīrah b. Wāʾil, with the rest of the story being similar to the above.[2]

(2) Concerning "*The response of the believers…*" (24:51), Imam al-Bāqir said: The verse refers to the Commander of the Faithful [Imam ʿAlī].[3]

(3) Concerning verse 24:54 (*but if you turn back, then on him rests that which is imposed on him and on you rests that which is imposed on you…*) Salamat b. Yazīd al-Juhanī said: Once I asked, "O Messenger

1 Ḥakam b. Abī al-ʿĀṣ was the cousin of both ʿUthmān and Abū Sufyān. The Messenger of God was the cousin of ʿAlī. (Trans.)

2 *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

of God! If there come rulers after you who demand from us the right that is incumbent upon us but deprive us of the right that God has given us, should we fight and oppose them?" The Prophet replied, "On them rests that which is imposed on them, and on you rests that which is imposed on you."[1]

Author's comment: There are other narrations along these lines. However, one should have no doubt that given Islam's spirit of reviving the truth and putting down falsehood, it would never approve the government and authority of oppressors who openly deny the people their rights. Islam does not deem it permissible to remain silent and bear the injustice and oppression of tyrants and transgressors if one is capable of making reform. Modern sociological studies have also shown that if authoritarian rulers follow their own views and desires in executive and judicial matters, it has far more dangerous and destructive results than the kindling of upheaval and war in order to make such rulers observe the rights and justice.

(4) Concerning verse 24:55 (*Allah has promised to those of you who believe…*) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: There is disagreement over this verse [among the exegetes]. What is narrated from the Ahl al-Bayt is that it is about the Mahdi from Muḥammad's family.

(5) ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn recited this verse (24:55) and said: By God, these are the followers (*shīʿah*) of us Ahl al-Bayt. He [God] will fulfil this about them through the hands of a man from us, and that is the Mahdi of this nation (ummah). That is the one about whom the Messenger of God said: "If there remains of the life of this world but one day, God will extend that day until a man from my progeny appears whose name is my name, and who shall fill the earth with justice and equity just as it is filled with injustice and inequity."
A similar account to this has been narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq.[2]

Author's comment: This is what the narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt say. We explained above how the verse matches this interpretation.

After narrating the above, *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says, "Hence, '*those who believe and do good*' would be the Prophet and his Household (Ahl al-Bayt)." However, the reader should know that this title ["*those who believe and do good*"] is more general and inclusive than that. The above narration does

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Qāniʿ and al-Ṭabarānī, on the authority of ʿAlqamat b. Wāʾil al-Ḥaḍramī.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ʿAyyāshī, via his chain of narration.

not limit it either, because the Imam says: "By God these are the followers of us Ahl al-Bayt. He [God] will fulfil this about them through the hands of a man from us…"

(6) Concerning verse 24:55 (*Allah has promised to those of you who believe…*) al-Barāʾ said: It was revealed about us [the Companions] when we were in intense fear.[1]

Author's comment: Apparently this implies that "those who believe" are the Companions [of the Prophet, s.a.w.]. However, you should know by now that there is no evidence in the verse to indicate this meaning. Rather, the evidence is against it [as discussed above in exposition of the verse].

(7) Ubayy b. Kaʿb said: When the Messenger of God and his Companions [that is, Muhājirīn, the Meccan immigrants] came to Medina and were given shelter by the Anṣār (Medinite supporters), all Arabs started firing at them from the same bow [that is, they all united against the Muslims]. As a result, the Muslims had to be armed and on the watch day and night. At that point, they said [amongst themselves, and/or to the Prophet], "Would you ever perceive a day when we may pass the night in peace and security, without fearing anyone but God?" That is when this verse was revealed: *Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good…* (24:55).[2]

Author's comment: This account only identifies the verse's context and cause of revelation. It neither defines the *meaning* of "those who believe" nor the *time* when God shall fulfil this promise. The same is true about another narration as follows:

(8) When it was revealed to the Prophet "*Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good…*" (24:55), he said: This nation should rejoice with the promise of eminence, superiority, [freedom to practice their] religion, support, and establishment in the land. However, if any of you does otherworldly acts for worldly gain and interest, then he shall have no share in the hereafter.[3]

Author's comment: Giving good news of succession to the nation does not necessarily and decisively mean that "*those who believe*" in the verse are

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Awsāṭ*, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), Ibn Mardawayh, al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*, and al-Ḍiyāʾ's *al-Mukhtārah*.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*.

the entire nation, the Companions in particular, or some of them specifically.

(9) When the Persians had gathered their forces for war, ʿUmar sought advice and consultation from Imam ʿAlī about whether or not he should move with the army to fight with them. The Imam said: Victory or defeat in this matter does not depend on abundance or scarcity [of forces]. This is God's religion which He has supported [against the other faiths], and it is His army which He has strengthened and aided, until it has reached the point that it has reached, and has risen as it has today. We hold a promise from God, where He says: *Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them successors in the land as He made successors those before them, and that He will most certainly establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and that He will most certainly, after their fear, give them security in exchange* (24:55). God shall fulfil His promise and support His army. The head of the government in Islam is like the thread which connects the beads. If it is broken, the beads will disperse; and sometimes when something disperses, it will never come together again. Notwithstanding their small number, the Arabs today count as many because of Islam, and are mighty due to their unity. Thus stay [here in Medina] as the axis, and rotate the mill [of battle] with [the help of] the Arabs. Let *them*—not yourself—get into the fire of war. If you leave this place [Medina], then the Arabs from the country and all sides will breach [their agreement] against you. You will end up worrying more about what you have left behind yourself unguarded than what you face ahead of you.

Moreover, if the Persians see you tomorrow [in the battlefield], they will say [among themselves], "He is the root of the Arabs. If you cut him, you will be relieved." This will intensify their determination and ambition against you…

As what you said about their [large] number, [you should know that] in the past we did not use to fight relying on number and abundance, but we used to fight relying on support and assistance [from God].[1]

Author's comment: In *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, the author has used this narration to prove his preferred view that "succession" in the verse refers to the rise of Islam during the time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. However, this

1 *Nahj al-balāghah*.

narration does not show this, but in fact it shows the opposite. The apparent meaning of the Imam's speech—where he says, "God shall fulfil His promise"—is that God's promise has not yet been fulfilled, but it will materialize in the future. This suggests that neither the religion had been established, nor the fear [of believers] had been replaced with security. How could it be otherwise when they were surrounded by two fears: the breach of Arabs from the inside, and the assail of enemies from the outside?!

(10) Abū al-Shaʿthāʾ said: Once I was sitting with Ḥudhayfah and Ibn Masʿūd. Ḥudhayfah said, "Hypocrisy is now over. Hypocrisy was only at the time of the Messenger of God. What there is today is *kufr* (disbelief, heresy, unfaithfulness) after *īmān* (belief, faith)." Ibn Masʿūd laughed and then asked, "Based on what do you say this?" He answered, "Based on this verse: *Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good…* (24:55)."

Author's comment: I wish I could know [and ask Ḥudhayfah]: Where did the hypocrites at the time of the Prophet go? Evidence from the Holy Book and history suggests that they were no less than one third of the people of Medina, where most of them used to be. Did they sincerely accept Islam on the day when the Prophet passed away? Or did they change their mind and ceased their duplicity and anticipation of calamities [for the believers]?![1]

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1 See verses 9:48 and 9:98 for reference to the hypocrites' duplicity and anticipation of calamities, respectively. The one third figure is based on the story of Battle of Uḥud, where the Prophet left Medina with a thousand soldiers, but one third (or three hundred) of them returned and deserted the Prophet. See verse 3:122, and the author's discussion of traditions in volume 7, pp. 18-19 of the English translation. (Trans.)

Verses 58-64

These verses continue the discussion of some laws and then finish the chapter. According to these verses, whatever God legislates is based on His knowledge. The truth and reality of His laws will be disclosed and unveiled to the people when they return to Him.

يا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِيَسْتَأْذِنْكُمُ الَّذِينَ مَلَكَتْ أَيْمانُكُمْ وَ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَبْلُغُوا الْحُلُمَ مِنْكُمْ ثَلاثَ مَرَّاتٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ صَلاةِ الْفَجْرِ وَ حِينَ تَضَعُونَ ثِيابَكُمْ مِنَ الظَّهِيرَةِ وَ مِنْ بَعْدِ صَلاةِ الْعِشاءِ ثَلاثُ عَوْراتٍ لَكُمْ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ لا عَلَيْهِمْ جُناحٌ بَعْدَهُنَّ طَوَّافُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ بَعْضُكُمْ عَلى بَعْضٍ كَذلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآياتِ وَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٥٨﴾

(24:58) ***O you who believe! Let those whom your right hands possess, and those of you who have not attained to puberty, ask permission of you three times; before the morning prayer, and when you put off your clothes at midday*** **(al-ẓahīrah)**, ***and after the prayer of the nightfall; these are three times of privacy*** **(ʿawrāt)** ***for you; neither is it a sin for you nor for them besides these, some of you go round about (waiting) upon others; thus does Allah make clear to you the communications, and Allah is Knowing, Wise.***

"Putting off clothes" means taking them off, which refers to a state when one does not like to be seen by strangers. *Ẓahīrah* means "noon, midday." *ʿAwrah* (singular of *ʿawrāt*) means "the private parts of body." They are called *ʿawrah* (lit. shame, disgrace) because of the shame and disgrace (*ʿār*) that one feels when they are uncovered. Apparently, *ʿawrah* in this verse means "what should be covered."

O you who believe…: This verse adds to a previous command in this chapter: *O you who believe! Do not enter* (24:27). That verse [24:27] ordered the believers to ask for permission before entering homes, while this verse [24:58] is like an exception that limits its applicability to servants and children. It suffices for them to ask for permission during only three times of the day.

… Let those whom your right hands possess…: That is, order them to

ask you for permission to enter. Apparently, "those whom your right hands possess" refers to only male servants, not female servants, although it could be that the expression includes both genders by generalization (*taghlīb*).[1] This is in fact found in hadith, which we shall present below.

… and those of you who have not attained to puberty…: This refers to children who have reached an age when they can tell the difference between good and bad,[2] but have not reached puberty yet. The reason for restricting it to children who can tell the difference between good and bad is because of what the verse says further down: *three times of privacy for you*.

… three times…: That is, three times "every day," which is inferred from the elaboration that follows:

…before the morning prayer, and when you put off your clothes at mid-day* (al-ẓahīrah)*, and after the prayer of the nightfall…: *Al-ẓahīrah* means "noon time."

… these are three times of privacy* (ʿawrāt) *for you…: This refers to the wisdom behind this law. The meaning is: These three times are three times of shame and embarrassment (*ʿawrāt*) for you; they are times that are naturally inappropriate for others to enter where you are.

… neither is it a sin for you nor for them besides these…: Other than the three times mentioned above, it is permissible for them not to ask permission, and you do not have to order them to ask permission either.

… some of you go round about (waiting) upon others…: This refers to the reason for the above permissibility and lenience. That is, they [your servants and children] come and go a lot, and some of you frequent others for service. Therefore, asking permission to enter every time would normally be burdensome. That is why it is sufficient for them to ask for permission only during the three times of privacy.

… thus does Allah make clear to you the communications…: "Communications" (*āyāt*) here mean "divine religious laws," for they are signs (*āyāt*) that indicate and point to God.

… and Allah is Knowing, Wise: He knows your circumstances and what laws suit your case. He wisely takes your welfare and benefit into consideration in His laws and commands.

وَ إِذا بَلَغَ الْأَطْفالُ مِنْكُمُ الْحُلُمَ فَلْيَسْتَأْذِنُوا كَمَا اسْتَأْذَنَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ

1 The expression apparently refers to male servants because it is in the masculine form. *Taghlīb* is when a group mixed of both male and female is referred to by masculine pronouns and/or masculine verbal forms. (Trans.)

2 This is called the age of *tamyīz*, and such children are called *mumayyiz*. (Trans.)

قَبْلِهِمْ كَذلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آياتِهِ وَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٥٩﴾

(24:59) ***And when the children among you have attained to puberty, let them seek permission as those before them sought permission; thus does Allah make clear to you His communications, and Allah is knowing, Wise.***

This verse says that the law of asking permission for three times only shall end for the children upon reaching puberty. When your children attain puberty, they should ask for permission just like "those before them," meaning the free adult men and women.

وَ الْقَواعِدُ مِنَ النِّساءِ اللاَّتِي لا يَرْجُونَ نِكاحاً فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْهِنَّ جُناحٌ أَنْ يَضَعْنَ ثِيابَهُنَّ غَيْرَ مُتَبَرِّجاتٍ بِزِينَةٍ وَ أَنْ يَسْتَعْفِفْنَ خَيْرٌ لَهُنَّ وَ اللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٠﴾

(24:60) ***And (as for) women advanced in years*** **(al-qawāʿid)** ***who do not hope for a marriage, it is no sin for them if they put off their clothes without displaying*** **(mutabarrijāt, from tabarruj)** ***their ornaments; and if they restrain themselves it is better for them; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.***

Qawāʿid is the plural of *qāʿidah* (lit. "retired, seated, sitting"), which means a woman who has sat aside (*qaʿada ʿan*) from marriage and has no hope in it because others have no interest in sleeping with her due to her old age. Therefore, "*who do not hope for a marriage*" is a descriptive and interpretive attribute. Some have said that *qāʿidah* means a woman who has despaired of menstruation (that is, one who has reached menopause), and its following attribute is a restrictive qualification.[1]

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

Tabarruj is when a woman displays her beauties that should be covered. Its root meaning is *ẓuhūr* (appearance, display, manifestation). The word *burj* (tower) is from the same root, which is a high building. It is named as such because it is apparent and visible.

This verse provides an exception to the universal law of hijab. The meaning is: It is permissible for old women to not put on hijab as long as they do

1 The meaning would be: Women who have reached menopause *and* have no hope of a marriage. (Trans.)

not display their beauties and ornaments.

… and if they restrain themselves it is better for them…: "Restraint" here indirectly refers to hijab (covering). That is: It is better for them to cover themselves than to put away their clothes.

… and Allah is Hearing, Knowing: This expression explains and justifies the above law by these two divine names. That is: Since God is Hearing and Knowing, He hears what these women demand by their innate nature (*fiṭrah*), and He knows what laws they require [for their true welfare and benefit].

لَيْسَ عَلَى الْأَعْمى حَرَجٌ وَ لا عَلَى الْأَعْرَجِ حَرَجٌ وَ لا عَلَى الْمَرِيضِ حَرَجٌ وَ لا عَلى أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَنْ تَأْكُلُوا مِنْ بُيُوتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ آبائِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أُمَّهاتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ إِخْوانِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَخَواتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَعْمامِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ عَمَّاتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَخْوالِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ خالاتِكُمْ أَوْ ما مَلَكْتُمْ مَفاتِحَهُ أَوْ صَدِيقِكُمْ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُناحٌ أَنْ تَأْكُلُوا جَمِيعاً أَوْ أَشْتاتاً فَإِذا دَخَلْتُمْ بُيُوتاً فَسَلِّمُوا عَلى أَنْفُسِكُمْ تَحِيَّةً مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ مُبارَكَةً طَيِّبَةً كَذلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآياتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(24:61) ***There is no blame on the blind man, nor is there blame on the lame, nor is there blame on the sick, nor on yourselves that you eat from your houses, or your fathers' houses or your mothers' houses, or your brothers' houses, or your sisters' houses, or your paternal uncles' houses, or your paternal aunts' houses, or your maternal uncles' houses, or your maternal aunts' houses, or what you possess the stores of, or your friend's [houses]. There will be no sin upon you if you eat together or separately. So when you enter houses, greet yourselves with a salutation from Allah, blessed (and) goodly; thus does Allah make clear to you the communications that you may understand.***

Apparently, this verse gives the believers the right to eat from the homes of their relatives, their friends, and those who trust them. They have permission to eat from these homes as much as they need to, without stepping into *isrāf* (extravagance, prodigality) or *ifsād* (causing damage and ruin).

There is no blame on the blind man, nor is there blame on the lame, nor is there blame on the sick, nor on yourselves…: Adding "yourselves"

to the previous groups shows that this law is not limited to the disabled people. Because of their disability, it is more likely that they find it difficult to earn their own living. That is why they are explicitly mentioned in the verse. Otherwise, the law equally applies to everyone, regardless of being blind, lame or sick.

… from your houses, or your fathers' houses…: There are two explanations for the inclusion of "your houses" in the list of relatives and others: (1) It indicates that this religion is based on the unity of the believers: "*they are guardians of each other*" [9:71]. There is no difference between one's own home and the home of his relatives, the homes that one has the keys to, and the homes of one's friends. (2) It does not refer to one's own home only, but it also includes the homes of one's son and spouse, as mentioned in hadith.

… or what you possess the stores* (mafātiḥahu) *of…: *Mafātiḥ* is the plural of *maftaḥ*, which means *makhzan* (depository, treasury). The meaning is: "Or homes that you possess their stores and depositories of food," where "possession" means "having charge over." This refers to being assigned as a custodian or agent over a house, or being given the keys to it.

…or your friend…: This adds to the previous list. It means, "or the *house* of your friend," where the word "house" is implied.

… There will be no sin upon you if you eat together or separately* (ashtātan)*…: *Ashtāt* is the plural of *shatt*, which can be either of the following: (1) It is a verbal noun that means *tafarruq* (dispersion, separation). It is used here instead of an adjective (dispersed, separate) for exaggeration, and is also used in the plural form. (2) It is an adjective that means *mutafarriq* (dispersed, separate), like the word *ḥaqq* [which has the same form as *shatt* and is an adjective, meaning "true"]. The meaning is: There is no sin for you whether you eat with one another in groups, or alone and dispersed from each other.

The meaning of the verse is universal and comprehensive, although it might have had a specific cause and context of revelation, as mentioned in the narrations. The exegetes have widely disagreed over the last two parts of the verse, but we saw it more appropriate to skip their debates. What we discussed above about these two parts is most compatible with the theme and context of the verse.

… So when you enter houses, greet yourselves with a salutation from Allah, blessed [and] goodly…: Following the previous discussion about homes, here the verse talks about the proper manners in entering them: *So when you enter houses…*

… greet yourselves …: That is, "greet the inhabitants of the house." It says "yourselves" to indicate the unity of the audience, because they are all

human beings that God has created, whether male or female. Moreover, they are believers, and belief unites people more strongly than blood ties or anything else. It is also possible that "*greet yourselves*" refers to mutual greeting: the person who enters should greet those who are there, and they should respond to his salaam.

… with a salutation from Allah, blessed [and] goodly…: That is, greet yourselves while this greeting of yours is a salutation (*taḥiyyah*) from God. He has legislated it and sent its rule so that Muslims may greet each other with it. This greeting is also blessed (*mubārak*), meaning that it has abundant good. Moreover, it is goodly (*ṭayyib*), meaning that one finds is pleasant. This is because the reality of such salutation spreads peace and security upon the one who is saluted; this is the best and most pleasant act between any two people. God then adds: *thus does Allah make clear to you the communications*. We discussed the meaning of this statement above [under verse 24:58].

… that you may understand: As the exegetes have suggested, this means: So that you may learn the teachings of your religion and thus act according to them.

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَ رَسُولِهِ وَ إِذا كانُوا مَعَهُ عَلى أَمْرٍ جامِعٍ لَمْ يَذْهَبُوا حَتَّى يَسْتَأْذِنُوهُ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَأْذِنُونَكَ أُولئِكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَ رَسُولِهِ فَإِذَا اسْتَأْذَنُوكَ لِبَعْضِ شَأْنِهِمْ فَأْذَنْ لِمَنْ شِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ وَ اسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمُ اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

(24:62) ***Only those are believers who believe in Allah and His Apostle, and when they are with him on a collective affair they go not away until they have asked his permission; surely they who ask your permission are they who believe in Allah and His Apostle; so when they ask your permission for some affair of theirs, give permission to whom you will of them and ask forgiveness for them from Allah; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.***

This verse defines who "believers" are by their quality, even though the meaning of the term is clear. This indicates that the verse is about those who are genuine believers; those who are literally characterized by the reality of belief. It means: "The believers are only those who believe in God and His Messenger with true and sincere faith. They are certain about God's unity, they are confident in their faith, and their hearts are attached to God's Messenger." Thus the verse continues by saying:

… and when they are with him on a collective affair they go not away until they have asked his permission…: A "collective affair" (*al-amr al-jāmiʿ*) is one that unites (*yajmaʿu*) the people to ponder, consult, and make a decision about matters such as battles and the likes. The meaning is: "When they are with the Messenger and have gathered around him for a public affair, they do not return or go away from him unless they ask for his permission to leave." It is for the same reason that the verse continues by saying:

… surely they who ask your permission are they who believe in Allah and His Apostle…: This is equivalently the first part of the verse reversed, intended to show that these two qualities [that is, belief and asking permission] are mutually concomitant and inseparable.

… so when they ask your permission for some affair of theirs, give permission to whom you will of them…: God leaves it to His Messenger to give permission if he wishes, and not to give permission if he does not wish to.

… and ask forgiveness for them from Allah; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful: This sentence commands the Prophet to ask forgiveness for them in order to comfort their hearts, and as a sign of [God's] mercy to them.

لا تَجْعَلُوا دُعاءَ الرَّسُولِ بَيْنَكُمْ كَدُعاءِ بَعْضِكُمْ بَعْضاً قَدْ يَعْلَمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ يَتَسَلَّلُونَ مِنْكُمْ لِواذاً فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٣﴾

(24:63) ***Do not hold the Messenger's calling (you) among you to be like your calling one to the other; Allah indeed knows those who steal away from among you, concealing themselves; therefore let those beware who go against his order lest a trial afflict them or there befall them a painful chastisement.***

"The Messenger's calling (*duʿāʾ*)" is when he invites the people to something. Some examples are: when he calls them to believe and to do good deeds; when he calls them to consult them about a momentous matter; when he calls them to congregational prayer; or when he commands them to any worldly or otherworldly affair. Each of these is a call (*duʿāʾ*) and invitation (*daʿwah*) by him.

This interpretation [of "the Messenger's calling"] is confirmed by the next part of the verse, which threatens those who disobey his orders: *Allah indeed knows those who steal away from among you*. This clearly confirms the above. It is also compatible with the theme and context of the last verse. God first admires and praises those who respond positively to the Prophet's

call, join his company, and do not leave him without his permission [in the previous verse]. Then, in this verse, He criticizes and threatens those who sneak away from him, hide behind one another, disregard his call, or dismiss his commands whenever he calls them.

The above should clarify the implausibility of two alternative interpretations suggested by some exegetes:

(1) "The Messenger's calling" means "addressing the Prophet." The verse is saying that the Prophet should be called with honor and respect, not in the same way that one calls other ordinary people. Therefore, instead of saying, "O Muḥammad" or "O son of ʿAbd-Allāh," one should call him, "O Messenger of God."

(2) "The Messenger's calling" means the Prophet's supplication against them in case they displease him. The verse is saying that they should not make themselves subject to his imprecation by causing his anger, because God does not reject his prayer.

The problem with both views is that the subsequent part of the verse is not compatible with them.

… Allah indeed knows those who steal away* (yatasallalūna, from tasallul) *from among you, concealing themselves* (liwādhan)*…: *Tasallul* means "pulling something out from the middle of something else with lenience and cunning." It is derived from pulling out a sword (*sall al-sayf*) from its sheath. *Liwādh* means *mulāwadhah*, which is "resorting to someone else for protection and hiding." The meaning is: God knows those of you who go out from amongst the people while they take shelter in others and hide themselves behind them. This means turning aside from, paying no attention to, and disregarding the Messenger's call.

… therefore let those beware who go against his order lest a trial* (fitnah) *afflict them or there befall them a painful chastisement: The word *fitnah* here is synonymous with *baliyyah* (affliction, calamity, disaster). Given our interpretation of the previous parts, the theme of the verse suggests that the pronoun "his" in "his order" refers to the Prophet [not to God], and "his order" means "the Prophet's call." Hence, the verse warns those who disobey the Prophet's order and call that they may be struck with an unwanted trial or a painful punishment.

Some have said: The pronoun "his" in "his order" refers to God. Even though there is no previous mention of God's order in the verse, His prohibition that "*Do not hold the Messenger's calling…*" is equivalent to an order. The prohibition effectively means: "Answer the Messenger's calling."

However, the first interpretation is more plausible.

أَلا إِنَّ لِلَّهِ ما فِي السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ قَدْ يَعْلَمُ ما أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ وَ يَوْمَ يُرْجَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِما عَمِلُوا وَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٤﴾

(24:64) ***Now surely to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth; He knows indeed what state you are upon; and the day on which they are returned to Him He will inform them of what they did; and Allah is Knower of all things.***

This is the closure for the sūrah, which sums up the chapter by referring to what was said at its beginning: *[This is] a chapter which We have revealed and made obligatory and in which We have revealed clear communications* (24:1). The last verse of the chapter serves to explain and justify its first verse.

Now surely to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth…: This refers to the universal and all-encompassing ownership of God. Everything belongs to Him and stands by Him. Thus, they are all known to Him with all of their properties, details and needs. Humans are no exception to this; God is well aware of their reality and what they need. The religion that He has legislated for them is part of what they need in order to live [a human life], just like the livelihood that He provides for them, which is what they need in order to survive [physically].

… He knows indeed what state you are upon…: He knows your true condition, which indicates your needs. This is a conclusion and consequence drawn from the previous argument: God's ownership of you and everything else necessitates His knowledge about your state and what you need in terms of religious law. Thus, He legislates them for you and imposes them upon you.

… and the day on which they are returned to Him He will inform them of what they did; and Allah is Knower of all things: The conjunction "and" links this sentence to "*what state you are upon*." That is: He also knows the day when they are returned to Him, which is the Day of Resurrection. He will then inform them about the reality of what they did; *and Allah is Knower of all things*.

Thus the verse provides two incentives to encourage the audience to accept God's religion. The first part of the verse says that the people should implement God's laws because He has legislated them only based on His knowledge that they *need* them; He knows that these laws would fulfil their needs. The second part of the verse says that the people should obey His legislation because He will *inform* them about the reality of what they do.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 24:58 (*O you who believe! Let those…ask permission of you…*) Ibn ʿAbbās said: "A verse that most of the people do not believe in [that is, do not practice] is the Verse of Permission (*āyat al-idhn*) [24:58]. However, I have ordered this slave girl of mine"—referring to a short girl standing by him—"to ask me for permission [when she wants to enter where I am during the mentioned three times]."[1]

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning the same verse: God has not permitted anyone to enter upon anyone during these three times except with permission, even if the person is one's father, sister, mother, or servant. The three times are after dawn (*fajr*), at midday, and after the second Evening Prayer (ʿIshāʾ). Then He has given permission for after these three times. "*Neither is it a sin for you nor for them besides these* (baʿdahunna)," which means after (*baʿd*) these three times, "*some of you go round about (waiting) upon others*" (24:58).

(3) Zurārah says: Concerning "*those whom your right hands possess*" (24:58) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "This is specific to men [that is, male servants], not women." I asked [for confirmation], "What about the women, should they [also] ask for permission during these three times?" He said, "No. They can come and go [without permission]."

(4) Concerning "*and those of you who have not attained to puberty*" (24:58), he [the Imam] said, "Of yourselves."[2] Then he added, "During these three times, you[3] should ask for permission like adults."[4]

Author's comment: There are other narrations from Imams al-Bāqir and al- Ṣadiq in *al-Kāfī*, saying that "*those whom your right hands possess*" only include males, not females.

(5) Concerning the same verse (24:58) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: It means, "Order your male and female servants to ask you for permission when they want to enter your places of privacy." This is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās. It has also been said that the verse only concerns male servants, as narrated from Ibn ʿUmar, and also from Imams

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Ibn Abī Shaybah, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Sunan*.

2 That is, this is about your children, not your slaves. (Trans.)

3 An alternative version of the hadith says "they." (Auth.)

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq.

Author's comment: These narrations and the apparent text of the verse [in masculine form] weaken the following account:

(6) Concerning this verse it is narrated from ʿAlī: [It is about] the women, because the men [used to] ask for permission [anyway].[1]

(7) The Messenger of God said: Let not the Bedouins overcome you in your naming of your prayer as ʿIshāʾ. The Book of God calls it ʿIshāʾ [in verse 24:58], while ʿAtamah is taken from the time of milking the camels.[2]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has narrated a similar account with the following wording:

(8) The Messenger of God said: Let not the Bedouins overcome you in the name of your prayer. God says: *and after the prayer of the nightfall* (al-ʿIshāʾ) (24:58), but al-ʿAtamah is a time for camels.[3]

(9) Imam al-Ṣādiq recited "*if they put off their clothes*" (24:60) and said: [This is about] the *jilbāb* (veil, cloak, over-garments) and *khimār* (head-covering, scarf) if the lady is aged.[4]

Author's comment: There are other narrations to this effect.

(10) Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: Before the appointment of the Prophet [as God's messenger], the people of Medina would not let blind, sick and lame individuals to partake in their meals. This was because the blind person cannot see good food [to choose], the sick person cannot eat as much as a healthy person does, and a lame person is no rival over food [with others].[5] But then it was revealed [through verse 24:61] that they are permitted to eat together.[6]

(11) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Once, al-Ḥārith left Medina on an expedition with the Messenger of God. He appointed Khālid b. Zayd to take care

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥarīz.

5 This suggests that the custom of separation was intended to make sure that individuals with disabilities are not disadvantaged or discriminated against having a good and full meal. However, some narrations say that the people were reluctant to mingle with these individuals because they saw it a disgrace and defilement. Therefore, there were apparently two opposite incentives for doing so. (Trans.)

6 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

of his family. However, since Khālid had a difficult condition, he was unwilling to eat from his [al-Ḥārith's] food. Thus this verse [24:61] was revealed.[1]

(12) Qatādah said: In the Pre-Islamic era, people from the tribe Banū Kinānah b. Khuzaymah used to see it disgraceful to eat alone. It was such that a hungry man among them would sometimes go around with a number of camels until he found someone to eat and drink with. Then God revealed: *There will be no sin upon you if you eat together or separately* (24:61).[2]

Author's comment: There are other narrations to this effect.

(13) Concerning verse 24:61 (*or what you possess the stores of, or your friend's*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: One can eat from the dates or condiments (*al-maʾdūm*)[3] of these groups that God has named in this verse, without their permission. Similarly, a wife can eat from the house of her husband without his permission. However, this does not include other types of food.[4]

(14) Imam al-Bāqir said: The Messenger of God said to a man, "You and your possessions belong to your father." Then Imam al-Bāqir added, "Nevertheless, I do not like him [the father] to take from the possessions of his son except what he needs and only if necessary. *Indeed God does not like mischief* [2:205]."[5]

(15) Muḥammad b. Muslim says: Once I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about a man who is in need while his son has some wealth. He said, "He can take from it. As with the mother, she cannot take from it unless as a loan upon herself."[6]

(16) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The wife can eat and donate [from the house of her husband]. The friend can also eat and donate from the house

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Thaʿlabī.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

3 *Maʾdūm* and *idām* refer to not just condiment, but anything that is eaten with bread. Some traditional examples are meat, vegetables, milk, vinegar, salt and butter. In this hadith it means any food other than staples that are the main source of a household's nourishment and survival. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Zurārah.

5 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī.

6 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

of his brother [in faith].[1]

(17) Concerning "*or what you possess the stores of*" (24:61) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: If a man has a *wakīl* (agent, representative) over his possessions, then the agent can eat [that is, spend] from the owner's possessions without his permission.[2]

(18) Concerning "*that you eat from your houses*" (24:61) *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says: This has been interpreted as "the house of your children" based on the following two narrations from the Infallibles: (a) "You and your possessions belong to your father." (b) "Indeed the purest of what a man eats is from his own earning, and his child is part of his earning."

Author's comment: There are many other narrations confirming the above narrations [from *al-Kāfī* and *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*].

(19) Abū al-Ṣabāḥ says: I asked Imam al-Bāqir about God's words: *So when you enter houses, greet yourselves…* (24:61). He said, "It is when one greets the people in a house when he enters and they greet him back. This is the meaning of greeting yourselves."

Author's comment: We mentioned this meaning in our exposition of the verse.

(20) Concerning verse 24:62 ("*Only those are believers who… until they have asked his permission*") *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: When the Messenger of God would gather the people for some mission or war that had come up, some of them would disperse and go away without his permission. Thus this verse was revealed about them, where God prohibits them from doing so.

(21) Concerning verse 24:62 ("*so when they ask your permission for some affair of theirs, give permission to whom you will of them*") *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: This was revealed about Ḥanẓalat b. Abī ᶜAyyāsh. He got married on the night before the Battle of Uḥud. So he asked the Messenger of God for permission to stay with his wife. That is when God revealed this verse: *give permission to whom you will of them* (24:62). Thus, he stayed with his wife. The next morning he showed up for the battle while he was *junub* (sexually defiled), and he was martyred. The Messenger of God said, "I saw the angels bathing Ḥanẓalah by water from the clouds, in silver bowls, between the

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Jamīl b. Darrāj.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Abī ᶜUmayr, on the authority of someone that he named.

heaven and the earth." That is how he came to be known as Ghasīl al-Malāʾikah (lit. "bathed by the angels").

(22) Concerning verse 24:63 (*Do not hold the Messenger's calling among you to be like your calling one to the other*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means do not call the Messenger of God as you call one another.

(23) Concerning verse 24:63 (*Do not hold the Messenger's calling among you to be like your calling one to the other*) Imam al-Bāqir said: Do not say, "O Muḥammad! O Abā al-Qāsim!" but say, "O Prophet of God! O Messenger of God."[1]

Author's comment: A similar account has been narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās. As we said above, the subsequent part of the verse is not quite compatible with this interpretation.

End of chapter 24

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

al-Furqān (The Distinction)

Verses 1-3

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

The theme of this chapter is that the Prophet's call is an authentic message, according to a Book and mission that have been sent to him from God. One of the central issues that is discussed elaborately in this chapter is the objections and criticisms that the disbelievers had raised against the Prophet being a messenger sent by God, as well as the Qur'an being a Book revealed by Him. The chapter returns to this topic repeatedly. This discussion is then followed by some arguments that prove monotheism and refute polytheism, some descriptions of the Day of Resurrection, and a mention of certain noble qualities in the believers. The chapter has an overall tone of warning and threat, not good news and glad tidings.

This is a Meccan chapter, as one can see from the tone and content of its verses. However, some exegetes have made an exception of three verses from it [as being Medinite], which are: *And they who do not call upon another god with Allah… And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful* (25:68-70). Apparently, these verses are excepted from being Meccan because they imply the prohibition of adultery. However, as we said in our discussion of narrations regarding the verse on wine in Sūrah al-Mā'idah (5:90), adultery and wine were known for being prohibited in Islam from the onset of the Islamic religious call.[1] What is stranger is that some exegetes have claimed that the entire chapter is Medinite, except for its first three verses: *Blessed is He Who… raising (the dead) to life* (25:1-3).

تَبارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقانَ عَلى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعالَمِينَ نَذِيراً ۝١

(25:1) *Blessed is* (tabāraka, from barakah) *He Who sent down the Furqān upon His servant that he may be a warner* (nadhīran, from indhār) *to the nations* (lil-ʿālamīn).

1 See volume 11, pp. 163ff of the English translation of *al-Mīzān*. (Trans.)

Barakah means "stability and subsistence of goodness" in something, such as the subsistence of water in a *birkah* (pond, pool). *Barakah* is derived from the phrase *barak al-baʿīr*, which is used when a camel places its chest on the ground and comes to a rest on it. *Tabārak* (as a verbal noun) is from the same root, meaning "subsistence and establishment of abundant good." It has been said that the verbal pattern of *tabārak* [which is based on *tafāʿul*] indicates emphasis and exaggeration. This term is used almost exclusively for God; it is rarely ever applied to others.

Furqān is synonymous with *farq* (division, distinction, discrimination, difference). The Qur'an is called *al-Furqān* in the sense that: (1) its verses have been revealed separately; or (2) it distinguishes truth from falsehood. The second interpretation is confirmed by the fact that in the Qur'an, God has also called the Torah *al-Furqān*, even though the Torah was revealed at once. Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufradāt*:

> The word *furqān* is more expressive and stronger in meaning than *farq*, because *furqān* is only used when talking about a distinction between truth and falsehood. It is similar [in terms of form and meaning] to *qanʿān* [derived from *qanaʿa*: to suffice, to be content], which is a person whose judgment is taken to be sufficient.[1] It is said that *furqān* is a noun, not verbal noun.[2] The word *farq* is used more generally, including both the specific meaning [of dividing between truth and falsehood] and other meanings [that is, other kinds of division].

ʿĀlamūn is the plural of *ʿālam*, meaning *khalq* (creatures, creations). *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ* says: "*ʿĀlam* means *khalq*, and its plurals are *ʿawālim* and *ʿālamūn*, meaning various kinds of created beings."

Although this term would include all creation—objects, plants, animals, humankind, the jinn and the angels—the context of the verse suggests that in this verse, it refers only to those creatures who are charged with religious duty. This would be humankind and the jinn, as much as we know. The reason for this qualification is that the verse says that the Qur'an was revealed for the purpose of warning.

One exegete has said: "This verse shows the universality of the Prophet's mission to all beings other than God." This interpretation is implausible given our explanation above. It neglects the fact that the Prophet's mission

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1 Therefore, *furqān* would mean "something which divides and separates." (Trans.)

2 If *furqān* is interpreted as a noun (*ism*), it would mean "gap, distance." It could also be a proper noun, referring to the Qur'an. If it is interpreted as a verbal noun (*maṣdar*), it would mean "division, distinction." (Trans.)

in this verse is for the purpose of warning. *ʿĀlamīn*, in this verse, is similar to how it is used in these verses: *And He has chosen you [O Mary] above the women of the world* (al-ʿālamīn) (3:42), and: *And We favored them [the Israelites] above the nations* (al-ʿālamīn) (45:16).

It is said that *nadhīr* means *mundhir* (warner), and *indhār* is synonymous with *takhwīf* (to warn, to threaten, to frighten).

Blessed is He Who sent down the* Furqān *upon His servant…: That is: "Abundant good is well established and fixed, in the One Who has sent down the *Furqān* upon His servant Muḥammad." This abundant good is something that benefits all of His creation. Therefore, saying that "abundant good is established and subsistent in God" is a way of referring to the emanation of good from Him upon His creatures. One case of this emanation is His revelation of a Book to His servant that divides between the truth and falsehood, saves all people from error, and leads them to guidance.

The verse incorporates the following points:

(1) The Qur'an is sent from God.

(2) The Prophet is a messenger from God and a warner to all nations.

(3) The Qur'an is a means of distinction between truth and falsehood.

(4) The Prophet is a servant of God. This means that he is only a slave of his Master, who is sent on a mission. Otherwise, he is not in charge of anything himself.

All of these points prepare the grounds to address the polytheists' objections and criticisms against the Qur'an and the Prophet in the following verses. They claimed that the Qur'an was a fabricated lie ascribed to God by the Prophet, who had been helped by others in doing so. They also criticized the Prophet for being an ordinary person who eats food and walks in the markets. They also made other claims which the Qur'an answers below.

Overall, the verse is saying that, through its evident proofs, this Book separates truth from falsehood. This means that the Noble Qur'an is true itself, because something that is false cannot separate truth from falsehood; rather, it assimilates falsehood to truth in order to deceive people into accepting it. The verse also says that the messenger who has brought the Book is an obedient servant of God, who warns the people with it and calls them to the truth. Thus, he is a true messenger, because if he were false, he would not call to the truth, but would deviate and diverge from it. Besides the above argument [based on the Qur'an being a *furqān*], the truth of the Prophet's messengership and the authenticity of his Book are attested to by God in His miraculous Book.

Some exegetes have said: "*Furqān*" refers to all divine scriptures that were sent to the prophets, and "servant" refers to all the prophets in general.

However, this view cannot be easily inferred from the apparent text of the verse.

***… that he may be* (li-yakūna) *a warner to the nations* (lil-ʿālamīn):** The letter *lām* in *li-yakūna* indicates *taʿlīl* (justification, explanation). It means that the purpose of sending the *Furqān* upon His servant—the Prophet—was so that he may be a warner to all the nations, from humankind and the jinn. *Al-ʿālamīn* is a plural that is preceded with the article *al-*, which indicates total inclusion (*istighrāq*) [of all humankind and jinn]. Using such a comprehensive term also implies that everyone has a single God, unlike the belief and practice of the polytheists, where every community had a god for itself, which was different from the god of other communities.

The verse only refers to the aspect of warning (*indhār*), but not the aspect of good news and glad tidings (*tabshīr*) [even though the Prophet's call involved both elements]. This is according to tone and theme of the verse, which is meant to convey threat and warning.

الَّذِی لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ لَمْ یَتَّخِذْ وَلَداً وَ لَمْ یَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِیكٌ فِی الْمُلْكِ وَ خَلَقَ كُلَّ شَیْءٍ فَقَدَّرَهُ تَقْدِیراً ﴿٢﴾

(25:2) *He, Whose is the kingdom* (mulk) *of the heavens and the earth, and Who did not take to Himself a son, and Who has no associate in the kingdom, and Who created everything, then determined it in a precise measure.*

The words *milk* and *mulk* mean "having authority over something such that one can manage, utilize and decide about it as he wants." This comes in two forms: (1) Sometimes it is in the form of a possession that one owns, such that the owner can use his possession however he wants to. (2) Sometimes it is in the form of having authority and dominion over someone else, such that the suprior can command, prohibit, and make judgments over the inferior. One example for the latter form of possession is the authority and dominion of a king over his subjects and citizens, including their possessions. This type is referred to as *mulk*. Therefore, *milk* is broader and more inclusive than *mulk*. As al-Rāghib says:

Malik (lit. "king, ruler") is one who can issue orders about what the public should do and what they should not do. This is specifically applicable to ruling and managing intelligent beings. That is why it is said, "the king of people" (*malik al-nās*) but it is not said, "the king of things" (*malik al-ashyāʾ*)…

Mulk is to have control over something by authority and command,

while *milk* is like a genus or a general category for *mulk*. Hence, every *mulk* is also *milk*, but not vice versa. Sometimes *milk* is exclusively used for possession and ownership, while *mulk* is exclusively used for other cases [of rule and authority].

He, Whose is* (lahu) *the kingdom of the heavens and the earth…: The letter *lām* in *lahu* shows exclusivity. It means that the heavens and the earth belong to Him; they are not independent from Him in any way whatsoever, and are not needless of His authority, direction and management. God is the only One Who wields authority over the heavens and the earth, and making them function as they do. He is the absolute Master and the sole King Who manages them by His command.

The above should clarify why the verse then says: *and Who did not take to Himself a son*. An absolute king—in every affair and aspect—does not need to take a child to himself. Adopting a child is because of either of two reasons:

(1) The king is incapable of managing all his affairs and cannot direct everything on his own, thus he adopts a child to help him in his tasks and plans. This is not applicable to God, because God has dominion and power over everything.

(2) The person has a limited lifespan, which means that he possesses what he owns only for a limited time. Thus he adopts a child to succeed him, and to take his place after him. However, God owns everything eternally, and is not subject to death or destruction. Therefore, He certainly has no need of taking a successor for Himself. This sentence involves a refutation of the polytheists and the Christians.

… and Who has no associate in the kingdom…: This is similar to the previous sentence; needing an associate or a partner happens when one does not or cannot have command over everything by himself. However, God's command encompasses all beings, and applies to all of their modes of existence. Nothing escapes from His authority. This involves a refutation of the polytheists' beliefs.

… and Who created everything, then determined it in a precise measure: The direction and management of all affairs trace back to Him alone. This includes: (1) how things are created and brought into existence (*khalq*); and (2) how they are given shape and measure (*taqdīr*). Thus, He is the Lord of everyone, and there is no lord but Him.

To explain the above theory, it should be noted that the creation of things is through means and instruments that occur before them or with them. This necessitates an interconnection between the beings. As a result, everything is confined in its existence and existential properties, according

to the means and causes that should come before it or with it. Therefore, the events that occur in the visible world are not separable from the creation of things, and they follow the causes and means that occur before them or with them. Meanwhile, there is no creator but God. Hence, no one directs the affairs in the universe other than Him. This means that there is no lord that owns and directs everything, except for God.

If the kingdom of the heavens and the earth belongs to Him, in the sense that He rules them and wields absolute authority over them, then it follows that He must also be the One Who upholds the creation. Had there been any other upholder who maintained the creation, the kingdom of the universe would also belong to that being. Creation, in turn, necessitates ordainment of measure, because ordainment is an offshoot of creation. Finally, if God is the One Who has measured and apportioned things, it follows that the direction of affairs (*tadbīr*) is also in His hands. Therefore, He is both the King and the Director: two constituent qualities that amount to Him being the Lord (*rabb*).

Therefore, the ascription of creation and measurement to God is a direct consequence of His kingdom of the heavens and the earth [that is, the entire world of creation]. However, the verse did not suffice in mentioning God's kingdom because the idolaters already admitted it. They believed in God's universal kingdom, meaning that He is the overall Ruler and Lord of everything, but they also believed in the partial rule and lordship of their gods, over certain parts of the universe, by God's entrustment and delegation. They believed that each of their gods is a king in its own domain and a lord over its own subjects, while God is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the God of gods. That is why, in order to prove the exclusivity of lordship to God, the verse did not suffice to saying: *He, Whose is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth*. Instead, it had to add: *and Who created everything, then determined it in a precise measure*.

It is as if the verse is answering the following objection: "Let us assume that God's kingdom of the heavens and the earth makes Him needless of adopting a child or partner in a way that would reduce and limit His dominion over certain things. But what is the problem with saying that He has adopted associates for Himself by entrusting and delegating certain affairs of the universe to them, while He is still the ultimate Owner and Lord over them and over what He has entrusted them with?" This objection constituted the belief of the polytheists. That is why, in their hajj formula of *talbiyah* they used to say, "Here I come (*labbayka*); there is no partner for You except a partner that is Yours: You own him and what he owns."

The verse answers the above objection by saying that creation belongs

to God, and the ordainment of measures is also inseparable from creation. These two add up to *tadbīr* (management, regulation, direction of affairs). Hence, the direction of everything belongs to Him, meaning that there is no kingdom or lordship other than His.

It should thus be clear that the first part of the verse—*He, Whose is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and Who did not take to Himself a son, and Who has no associate in the kingdom*—proves God's unity in lordship, and refutes Him having a child or partner through affirming His absolute kingdom over everything. Then, the subsequent part of the verse—*and Who created everything, then determined it in a precise measure*—explains and elaborates the meaning of God's universal kingdom. It says that such a kingdom hinges on creation and measurement. A corollary of this sense and kind of kingdom is that He must be in charge of every rule and direction; it is not logically perceivable that He would entrust any affair to any of His creatures.

The exegetes have had other discussions on this verse and the previous one, but we shall skip them because they are not beneficial.

وَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً لا يَخْلُقُونَ شَيْئاً وَ هُمْ يُخْلَقُونَ وَ لا يَمْلِكُونَ لِأَنْفُسِهِمْ ضَرًّا وَ لا نَفْعاً وَ لا يَمْلِكُونَ مَوْتاً وَ لا حَياةً وَ لا نُشُوراً ﴿٣﴾

(25:3) ***And they have taken besides Him gods, who do not create anything while they are themselves created, and they control not for themselves any harm or profit, and they control not death nor life, nor raising (the dead) to life.***

In the previous verses, God described Himself as the Creator and Designer of everything, and as the One Who possesses the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. Given these qualities, He must be the god which is served and worshiped. That is why, in this verse, He points to where the polytheists had erred: they were serving and worshiping idols that have not created anything, but are themselves created. Their gods also did not control anything for themselves nor others.

And they have taken…: The pronoun "they" here, refers to the polytheists, even though they were not named above. Such expression [that is, using a pronoun for a noun that is not explicitly identified] implies humiliation and derogation.

… besides Him gods, who do not create anything while they are themselves created…: This refers to the idols that the polytheists used to make, by carving or other ways. They are called "gods" in the verse, but then described

as: *who do not create anything while they are themselves created*. This shows that they are only given the name of a "god" by the idolaters, but they do not have any real characteristic of a god. He says: *They are naught but names which you have named; you and your fathers* (53:23).

***… who do not create anything* (shayʾan)…:** The usage of the indefinite form (*nakirah*) in a negation underscores the verse's rebuke against the polytheists for turning away from God, Who is the Creator of everything, and instead, clinging to idols that have not created anything whatsoever. In fact, their gods are even more abject than that, because they are themselves created by their own worshipers, and are a result of the imagination of their worshipers. The same idea [of using the indefinite form (*nakirah*) in a negation] applies to the rest of the verse: *any harm or profit… not death nor life, nor raising (the dead) to life*.

…and they control not for themselves any harm or profit, and they control not death nor life, nor raising (the dead) to life: If a being is to be adopted and served as a god, it must necessarily be in charge of some good. However, this sentence declares that the idols are not in possession of anything. One worships a god so that it would deflect some harm from him, or bring some benefit to him. If the gods do not own any harm or benefit—even for themselves—then their service and worship would be nothing but insanity and error.

It should thus be clear that adding "themselves," in this context, underscores the verse's rebuke against the polytheists. The verse has an escalating tone, to this effect: These gods cannot deflect any harm from themselves and neither can they attract any benefit to themselves, let alone doing so for others [that is, their worshipers].

The verse mentions "harm" before "profit" because avoiding a loss takes precedence over making a gain.

… and they control not death nor life, nor raising (the dead) to life: The gods are not in charge of death so that they could fend it off from their worshipers or anyone else. They are not in charge of life so that they could take it away from anyone that they wish, or give it to anyone that they choose. And they are not in charge of resurrection so that they could raise the people to requite them for their actions. These powers and controls [which they lack,] are inseparable from the status of a god and lord.

Examining Narrations

(1) 1. Once, Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about "the Qurʾan" and "the Furqān": Are they two different things or are they the same thing? He said: "Qurʾan" refers to the entire book, while "Furqān" refers

to the *muḥkam* (decisive, solid, clear) parts that are obligatory to act upon.[1]

(2) 2. Part of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Salām's discussion with the Messenger of God was that he asked, "Tell me, has God revealed any book to you?" The Prophet answered, "Yes." He asked, "And what is that book?" The Prophet said, "The Furqān." He asked, "Why has your Lord called it Furqān?" The Prophet replied, "Because its verses and chapters are *mutafarriq* (divided, separated, disjointed) and it has been revealed not in tablets, while the other books—like the scrolls (*al-ṣuḥuf*), the Torah, the Gospel and the Psalms—were revealed all at once in tablets and papers." He said, "You are right, O Muḥammad."[2]

Author's comment: Each of these two narrations pertains to one of the meanings of Furqān that we presented above.

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Sinān, on the authority of someone that he named.

2 Mufīd's *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ*.

Verses 4-20

These verses narrate the polytheists' criticisms of the Prophet with regards to the Noble Qur'an, and respond to them.

وَ قالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنْ هَذا إِلاَّ إِفْكٌ افْتَراهُ وَ أَعانَهُ عَلَيْهِ قَوْمٌ آخَرُونَ فَقَدْ جاؤُ ظُلْماً وَ زُوراً ﴿٤﴾

(25:4) ***And those who disbelieve say: This is nothing but a lie*** **(ifk)** ***which he has forged, and other people have helped him at it; so indeed they have done injustice and (uttered) a falsehood.***

There was a reference made to the pagans in general, in the last verse: *And they have taken besides Him gods* (25:3). Yet, this verse does not simply say, "And they say," but it explicitly describes them as: *And those who disbelieve say*. This suggests that the subject of this verse is not all polytheists, but it is specifically the disbelievers in Arabia.

The demonstrative pronoun, "this" [in "*This is nothing but a lie*"], refers to the Noble Qur'an. The disbelievers referred to the Qur'an simply as "this," instead of mentioning its name or attribute, in order to belittle and downgrade it. *Ifk* means "diverted and distorted speech." What they meant by "a forged lie" was that this book was a lie which the Prophet had made up and ascribed to God.

It can be inferred from the context that the "other people" [who are accused of helping the Prophet in apparently forging the Qur'an] in this verse refers to some of the People of the Book. According to some narrations, these "other people" were ʿAddās [and/or ʿĀbis], the Mawlā (client, freedman) of Ḥuwayṭib b. ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā, Yasār, the Mawlā of al-ʿAlāʾ b. al-Ḥaḍramī, and Jabr, the Mawlā of ʿAmir. They were among the People of the Book and had read the Torah. Later, they converted to Islam, and the Prophet used to visit them frequently. That is why the polytheists made these charges.

… so indeed they have done **(jāʾū)** ***injustice and (uttered) a falsehood:*** According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, the verbs *jāʾa* and *atā* (lit. "to come") sometimes mean *faʿala* (to do), and are thus used transitively. Given this, the verse would mean: "So indeed they have done injustice and falsehood."

Two alternative suggestions [for the verse's ending] are:

(1) The verse involves an omitted preposition before "injustice" (called

manṣūb bi-nazᶜ al-khāfiḍ). The implied meaning is: "They have brought injustice (*jāᶜū bi-ẓulmin*)."

(2) "Injustice" is an adverb that describes the state (*hāl*) in which "they came." The meaning is: "They came while being unjust (*jāᶜū ẓālimīn*)."

The second point, however, is an implausible interpretation. *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* also says:

One might ask: How come the verse gives the disbelievers such a short answer? The answer is: They were already challenged to bring the like of the Qur'an and they could not do so; that is why a short answer here is sufficient, as it points to that.

However, as we shall discuss below, the answer to their claims in these two verses—"*This is nothing but a lie which he has forged*" (25:4) and "*The myths of the ancients…*" (25:5)—is apparently given in the next verse, where God says: *Say: He has revealed it Who knows the secret…* (25:6). Thus, the statement "*so indeed they have done injustice and (uttered) a falsehood*" is rather a general rejection of their stand [but not the end of God's answer]. [Even if it is taken on its own,] it is equivalent to rejecting one's view with evidence, and the evidence is the verses which challenge the disbelievers to bring the like of the Qur'an [as *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* has observed correctly].

Overall, the meaning of the verse is: Those who disbelieve among the Arabs say, "This Qur'an is only a speech that has been distorted from its original and proper form, in the sense that it is Muḥammad's speech but he ascribes it to God. Thus, he has attributed a lie to God, and in doing so he has been helped by other people, which are some of the People of the Book." These disbelievers have therefore committed injustice and have lied by making these statements.

وَ قالُوا أَساطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ اكْتَتَبَها فَهِيَ تُمْلى عَلَيْهِ بُكْرَةً وَ أَصِيلاً ۝٥

(25:5) *And they say: The myths* (asāṭīr) *of the ancients—he has got them written* (iktatabahā)*—so these are read out* (tumlā, from imlāʾ) *to him morning and evening* (bukratan wa aṣīlan).

Asāṭīr is the plural of *usṭūrah*, which means "written news and reports." However, it is mostly used for false and superstitious stories [that is, fables, legends, myths]. *Iktitāb* means "to write." Since the Prophet was unlettered, the attribution of writing is metaphorical for him, not literal. It could mean that these "myths" were written by his request, much like when a ruler says, "I wrote such-and-such to so-and-so," while the person who has actually done the writing is his scribe. This [non-literal usage of "writing"] is confirmed by the subsequent part of the verse: *so these are read out to him*

morning and evening. If he were literally the writer, then it would not make sense to say that the myths are "*read out to him*." It has also been said that *iktitāb* means *istiktāb* (asking for writing).

Imlāʾ means "conveying a speech verbally to either a listener—so that he may retain and remember it—or to a scribe—so that he may write it." The first meaning is intended in this verse because it says: *he has got them written—so these are read out to him*. The context suggests that the writing has already been done in one shot, while reading out the myths occurs gradually. That is: "He already has the Book written and compiled with him, and it is read out to him in portions once a while. Thus he retains and remembers what is read to him, and then recites it for the people."

Bukrah and *aṣīl* are the same as *ghadāh* (morning) and *ʿashī* (evening, late afternoon) respectively. What is meant by "*morning and evening*" in this verse is "time and again, repeatedly, continuously."

Another suggested meaning by some exegetes for this expression is: It specifically refers to two times in the day: (1) the beginning of the day, when the people have not yet left their homes; and (2) the end of the day after they have returned home. Therefore, it is equivalent to saying: It is read to him privately, and in secret.

This verse serves as an elaboration and interpretation of the previous verse. It is as if they are clarifying their claim: This Book is a lie that he has fabricated, and other people have helped him in creating it by writing for him the fables of the ancient generations, and then reading them out to him piece by piece and repeatedly over time. Then he recites it to the people and attributes it to God.

Therefore, the entire verse is in the words of "those who disbelieve" (25:4). One exegete has said: "The subsequent part of the verse—*he has got them written…*—is not the continuation of their words, but it is part of God's speech. It is in the form of a rhetorical question in response to their claim: "*The myths of the ancients*." However, the tone and theme of the verse does not agree with this interpretation.[1]

قُلْ أَنْزَلَهُ الَّذِی یَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ فِی السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ کانَ غَفُوراً رَحِیماً ﴿٦﴾

(25:6) *Say: He has revealed it Who knows the secret in the heavens and the earth; surely He is ever Forgiving, Merciful.*

This verse orders the Prophet to refute the claim and denial of the

1 In other words, the entire verse is apparently a uniform speech by a single speaker. (Trans.)

disbelievers [in the last verse], where they accused the Qur'an of being a fabricated lie, and being the myths of the ancients that has been written and is read out to the Prophet once a while.

"Secret," in this verse, means "the hidden and unknown aspect of things." Describing God as "One Who knows the secret in the heavens and the earth" indicates that this Book, which He has sent, comprises of certain secret realities that are hidden from the intellect of humankind. It also alludes to their transgressions, one of which was accusing the Qur'an of being a fabricated lie and a fable of the ancients. It says that God knows of these false claims and accusations of theirs.

… surely He is ever Forgiving, Merciful: According to most exegetes, this expression explains and justifies the respite that is evidently given to the disbelievers by God, as He has postponed and deferred the punishment which they rightfully deserve for their transgression, defiance, and denial of the truth.

The exegetes have thus interpreted the verse as follows: Say: The Qur'an is neither a fabricated lie, nor one of the fables of the ancient people—unlike what you claim. Rather, it is a Book sent from God which includes hidden secrets that your intellects cannot reach and your wits cannot comprehend. Your false accusations of this Book as a lie and fable, and your rejection of its truths, are heinous sins that qualify you for punishment. Yet, God gives you respite and postpones the punishment which is due for your sins, because He is characterized by forgiveness and mercy. The delay of your punishment is a consequence of these divine qualities.

However, the context and theme of the verse does not support the above interpretation offered by the exegetes. According to their interpretation, the verse is essentially refuting the disbelievers' accusations—that the Qur'an is a fabricated lie and a fable—by saying that it is sent from God and comprises of hidden realities that they have no access to learn about. The problem is that this is not an appropriate answer in this debate, because it attempts to refute an unverifiable claim by another similarly unverifiable claim—if not more so!

Furthermore, the explanation given at the end of the verse—*surely He is ever Forgiving, Merciful*—is more compatible with God totally discharging their punishment altogether. In order to explain God's respite and postponement, the verse should have stated other names like *al-Ḥalīm* (the Forbearing, the Clement, the Tolerant), *al-ʿAlīm* (the All-Knower) and *al-Ḥakīm* (the All-Wise), not *al-Ghafūr* (the All-Forgiver) and *al-Raḥīm* (the All-Merciful).

Given the context of argument and defense [in response to the

polytheists' accusations against the Qur'an] it is more plausible to say that the verse refers to God's forgiveness and mercy in order to clarify, explain and justify why God has sent this Book. After all, it was already mentioned above [in verse 25:1] that He has sent down the Book upon His servant—the Prophet—so that he may be a warner to all nations. This statement [in verse 25:1] refers to *nubuwwah* (prophethood; lit. "giving news, of the unseen"). Given this background, describing God as "One Who knows the secret in the heavens and the earth" suggests that the innermost secret of the disbelievers calls for divine forgiveness and mercy. This is a genuine request that they express through their very state of being. Their innermost secret is their innate human nature, makeup and disposition (*fiṭrah*) which seeks human perfection, felicity and a happy ending. Despite this genuine inner drive, most of them err in applying it in practice, because they mistakenly assume that their happiness and perfection lie in enjoying the life of this world and in its adornments. Therefore, this verse is a demonstrative argument that proves the truth of the prophetic call which is found in the Qur'an, and disproves the claim that it is a lie which is pulled from the fables of the ancient people.

The verse's argument can be elaborated as follows: God knows the secret in the heavens and the earth. Thus, He knows that deep inside you, within your innate nature and formation, there is a love and attraction toward felicity, and a pull toward having a good ending. In other words, what you want deep in your heart is your true happiness, both this world and the next. Then, since God is also Forgiving and Merciful, His responds to what you ask for in your inmost secrets, and by the tongue of your innate nature (*fiṭrah*). That is why He guides you to the path that ensures your felicity and happiness.

So here it is, a Book that outlines your path to happiness for you. Hence, it is not a fabricated lie that has been attributed to God; nor is it like the fables of the ancient societies. Rather, it is a Book that contains what you call for by your innate nature, and what you ask in your secret desires. If you respond positively to it, God's forgiveness and mercy will embrace you; but if you turn away from it, you will be deprived of those bounties from God. This means that the Book is sent from God, because if it were not sent from Him as it claims so, then it would not guide to real happiness, it would not call to pure truth, and there would be discrepancy and disagreement in its content. In that case [that is, if it were not sent from God], it would sometimes call you to what is good and beneficial for you—meaning things that earn God's forgiveness and mercy for you—and sometimes to what is bad and harmful for you—meaning things that stir God's anger against you and cause His punishment to befall you.

وَ قالُوا ما لِهذَا الرَّسُولِ يَأْكُلُ الطَّعامَ وَ يَمْشِى فِى الْأَسْواقِ لَوْ لا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ فَيَكُونَ مَعَهُ نَذِيراً ﴿٧﴾

(25:7) *And they say: What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats food and goes about in the markets; why has not an angel been sent down to him, so that he should have been a warner with him?*

This verse describes the disbelievers' criticism against God's Messenger, following the account of their claims and criticisms about the Qur'an: *And those who disbelieve say: This is nothing but a lie which he has forged* (25:4). The title "this Messenger" implies scorn and derision, because the disbelievers who said this did not believe in the Prophet's message and mission.

… What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats food and goes about in the markets…: This question displays a tone of surprise. The idolaters believed that human beings are incapable of connecting to the unseen, because their existence is material, immersed in the darkness of this world, and tainted by its defilements. That is why they sought angels as means of connecting to the divine. They worshiped the angels so that the angels would intercede for them before God and take them closer to Him.[1] According to the idolaters, only the angels had a position of proximity to God, and were connected to the unseen. Thus, if there were to be any mission or messengership, it should have been through an angel; no human being could have a share in that mission.

This should clarify what they meant by saying: *What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats food and goes about in the markets?* What they meant was that a divine mission is not compatible with normalcies such as eating food and going to the markets to earn a living. A divine mission is a transcendent connection which is incongruent with material attachments. That is why it can only be an angelic position. God has narrated this idea from them in several places in the Qur'an, such as: *If Allah had pleased, He could certainly have sent down angels* (23:24).

The above explanation shows that the disbelievers' next statement was a reduction of their request; a stepping down on their part: *why has not an angel been sent down to him, so that he should have been a warner with him?* That is: How can this claimant of messengership be a messenger, while he eats food and walks in the markets? A messenger can only be an angel who is free from such material qualities. Now, if we want to accept his

1 See verses 10:18 and 39:3. (Trans.)

messengership despite his human nature, then an angel must be sent upon him, to be a warner alongside him. This is necessary, so that the message and warning would be connected to the unseen via an angel.

أَوْ يُلْقى إِلَيْهِ كَنْزٌ أَوْ تَكُونُ لَهُ جَنَّةٌ يَأْكُلُ مِنْها وَ قالَ الظَّالِمُونَ إِنْ تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلاَّ رَجُلاً مَسْحُوراً ﴿٨﴾

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(25:8) ***Or (why is not) a treasure sent down to him, or he is made to have a garden from which he should eat? And the unjust say: You do not follow any but a man bewitched.***

Similar to the last sentence, this is a further reduction of the disbelievers' requests. That is: Even if no angel descends upon him and he is supposed to be an independent human messenger, then at least a treasure must be sent to him from the heaven. That would cover his material needs, so that he would not have to carry the burden of going to the markets in order to make a living. After all, sending a treasure to him is easier than sending an angel to him to help him convey God's message.

… or he is made to have a garden from which he should eat?…: This is yet another stepping down in their request. The meaning is: If no treasure is sent down to him, then at least he should have a garden as a source of livelihood, so that he would not have to earn a living. This is easier than a treasure being sent to him from the heaven.

… And the unjust say: You do not follow any but a man bewitched: As the exegetes have said, "the unjust" people are those who made the above requests. This is an example of using an explicit noun instead of a pronoun. Describing the disbelievers by injustice is meant to indicate their extent of transgression and defiance against God and His Messenger.

… You do not follow…: The disbelievers said this to the believers in order to rebuke them and divert them from their true path. "*A man bewitched*" refers to the Prophet. What the disbelievers meant, was that some magicians had put a spell on the Prophet; that is why he thinks that he is a messenger, and imagines an angel of revelation coming to him with a book and a mission.

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انْظُرْ كَيْفَ ضَرَبُوا لَكَ الْأَمْثالَ فَضَلُّوا فَلا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ سَبِيلاً ﴿٩﴾

(25:9) ***See what likenesses*** **(al-amthāl)** ***do they apply to you, so they have gone astray, therefore they shall not be able to find a way.***

Amthāl (plural of *mathal*) is synonymous with *ashbāh* (similitudes,

likenesses). Some have said that *mathal* in this verse means "description" (*waṣf*),[1] as in the verse: *A description* (mathal) *of the garden which those guarding (against evil) are promised: Therein are rivers of water that do not alter* (47:15). The gist of the verse is: See how they have described you and have thereby gone far astray with regards to you? Thus there is no hope in them finding the way to the truth.

Their descriptions of the Prophet were mentioned above: He eats food and walks in the markets, so he is not befitting for the divine mission, because a messenger should be a transcendent being that has no attachment to matter. At least he should be needless of using ordinary means in order to earn a living [25:7]. They also described him as someone who has been bewitched [25:8].

… so they have gone astray, therefore they shall not be able to find a way: The result of their above descriptions of the Prophet is that they have gone far astray, such that they cannot return to the right path. That is why there is no hope that they will ever be guided. Sometimes a person deviates from the path only slightly; in such cases, there is hope that he may get back on track. However, sometimes a person completely turns his back from the path, and moves in the opposite direction. The more they move, the farther away they get from the path. Now, if people call the Book of God fables, describe His Messenger as being bewitched, and consistently add to their mischief, defiance and derision of the truth, how can there be any hope for their guidance while this is their condition?

تَبارَكَ الَّذِی إِنْ شاءَ جَعَلَ لَكَ خَيْراً مِنْ ذلِكَ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِی مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهارُ وَ يَجْعَلْ لَكَ قُصُوراً ﴿١٠﴾

(25:10) *Blessed is He Who, if He will, shall give you what is better than this, gardens beneath which rivers flow, and He will give you palaces* (quṣūran).

The demonstrative pronoun "this" in "*better than this*" refers to the disbelievers' demand, where they said: *or he is made to have a garden from which he should eat* (25:8). It can also refer to everything that they requested, including the treasure and the garden. The word *quṣūr* is the plural of *qaṣr*,

1 This is in fact the primary meaning of the word *mathal* in the Qur'an. A common Qur'anic expression is "the *mathal* of A is like the *mathal* of B," where *mathal* should not be translated as "likeness, parable, or similitude" but it should be translated as "description, quality, or attribute." (Trans.)

meaning "tall and strong building." The indefinite form of *quṣūran* indicates magnification and aggrandizement.

This verse serves as a response to the disbelievers' criticism of the Prophet and their demands that an angel must be sent to him, that a treasure should be cast upon him, or that he must have a garden. Meanwhile, the verse involves a shift from the first person to the third person. That is, instead of saying, "Say: If my Lord wills, He shall give me…" it says, "*Blessed is He Who, if He will, shall give you…*" This transition indicates that they [the polytheists of Mecca] are not worthy of receiving an answer [from God and His Messenger], and neither are they qualified for being addressed [by God and His Messenger]. This is because they knew the invalidity and inappropriateness of what they were proposing to the Prophet, who had made it clear to them that he is only a mortal like them, except that he receives revelation. He had not claimed that he had supernatural powers and divine authority to do anything that he wanted to, or to do anything that is requested from him. This is seen in what God says in Sūrah al-Isrāʾ after narrating some of their demands: *Say: Glory be to my Lord; am I aught but a mortal messenger?* (17:93).

That is why God refrains from addressing the polytheists and replying to their requests. Instead, He only says to His Prophet that his Lord—Who has chosen him as a messenger, and Who has sent the *Furqān* upon him that he may be a warner to all nations [25:1]—is capable of even greater things than what the polytheists proposed. If He wants, He can give the Prophet much better than that: gardens with rivers flowing underneath them, and palaces that are beyond the description of any speaker. These are much better than having a garden to eat from, or receiving a treasure to spend for his needs.

This interpretation answers the polytheists' requests for seeing a treasure or a garden. But they also had another request: that an angel must be sent down to the Prophet to be a warner with him and to help him in the mission [25:7]. The verse has left this unanswered because its invalidity is evident. God has answered this expectation elsewhere in His Book, in different words, such as: *And if We had made him [Our messenger] angel, We would certainly have made him a man, and We would certainly have made confused to them what they make confused* (6:9), *Say: Had there been in the earth angels walking about as settlers, We would certainly have sent down to them, from the heaven, an angel as a messenger* (17:95), and: *We do not send the angels but with truth, and then they would not be respited* (15:8). We have already discussed and elaborated the argument involved in each of these verses under the exposition of each.

Given the above explanation, it should be clear that this verse is about

giving gardens and palaces to the Prophet *in this world*. The verse is in a context of debate and argument, and is meant to answer what they said. The gist of the context is: "The polytheists demand this and that from you, and by these requests they want to defeat and overcome you. However, your Lord is capable of doing much greater than that. If He wills, He shall give you better than that, which would be gardens with rivers flowing underneath them…," which would obviously have to be in this world; otherwise, it would not conclude the argument.

Some exegetes have said that the verse is about gardens and palaces *in the hereafter*. Our explanations above should show why this is not a plausible interpretation.

Worse than that is another suggested interpretation: Gardens with rivers flowing underneath them pertain to this world, while palaces pertain to the hereafter. This is deduced from the use of past tense about gardens—*in shāʾa jaʿala* (lit. "if He willed, He would have given")—as opposed to the use of the present tense about palaces: *yajʿal* (and He will give you). The use of past tense suggests that the verb has already occurred, which is consistent with events in this world, while the use of present and future tense (*mustaqbal*) is appropriate for talking about the hereafter.

However, the entire verse is a conditional statement, and conditional statements are not bound by any time or tense. Using different wording here [that is, *jaʿala* and *yajʿal*] is meant for variation of expression (*tafannun*) and renewing the structure (*tajdīd al-ṣūrah*). God is the Knower.[1]

بَلْ كَذَّبُوا بِالسَّاعَةِ وَ أَعْتَدْنا لِمَنْ كَذَّبَ بِالسَّاعَةِ سَعِيراً ﴿١١﴾

(25:11) ***Nay, they reject the Hour, and We have prepared a burning fire for him who rejects the Hour.***

This verse involves a transition (indicated by "nay") from the polytheists' criticisms and objections against the Prophet for eating food and going to the markets (which implicitly show their rejection of him). The meaning is: They reject and deny your prophethood *not because* you eat food and go to the markets. They say that only as an excuse at the surface; but what has really caused them to reject your prophethood and criticize you is their

1 In other words, the variation of tense in the verse is a literary art meant to avoid dullness and uniformity of speech. "God is the Knower" suggests that there are possibly other nuances and reasons for such usage of language, but there are no grounds for saying that gardens refer to this world while palaces refer to the hereafter. (Trans.)

rejection of the Hour and their denial of the hereafter. Clearly, if there is no Hour [that is, no resurrection], then prophethood would be pointless; and if there is no reckoning and retribution, then there is no place for religion and shariah (divine law).

What we see here is similar to what we saw in Sūrah al-Isrāʾ. There, too, the chapter first lists the demands of the polytheists, and then it states the real cause behind their excuses: *Say: Glory be to my Lord; am I aught but a mortal messenger? And nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said: What! Has Allah raised up a mortal to be a messenger?* (17:93-94).

A group of exegetes have said: "*Nay, they reject the Hour*" states another false belief of theirs, just as there was mention of their other beliefs about monotheism, the Book, and messengership in the Qur'an: *And they have taken besides Him gods* (25:3), *And those who disbelieve say: This is nothing but a lie…* (25:4), and: *And they say: What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats…* (25:7). These exegetes have different views about why the verse involves a transition [indicated by *bal*, lit. "nay, rather"]. Here are some suggested explanations why a transition has been used here: (1) because the hereafter indubitable; (2) because the rejection of the hereafter is greater than their other false beliefs; and (3) because the rejection of the hereafter is stranger. And there is more to the list.[1]

However, the context and theme of the verses do not support this view. The theme of these verses is to discuss the disbelievers' criticisms *against the Messenger* and respond to them, and this theme is not yet finished because it continues below: *And We have not sent before you any messengers but they most surely ate food and went about in the markets* (25:20), followed by the subsequent verses. It does not make sense to bring up their rejection of the Hour, in the midst of verses that narrate their rejection of the Messenger and respond to them. This is evident.

… and We have prepared a burning fire* (saʿīran) *for him who rejects the Hour: *Saʿīr* means "hot burning fire." The verse has used a description here [that is, "*him who rejects the Hour*"] instead of using a pronoun [hat is, "them"]. This is to show that the punishment of the burning fire is fixed for *anyone* who rejects the Hour. It is not restricted to specific audience of

1 In other words, these exegetes claim that this verse adds to the list of the polytheists' false beliefs discussed in verses 25:3, 25:4 and 25:7. The objection is that if that were the case, then the verse should have begun with the conjunction "and" like those verses. Their explanations essentially say that since this false belief was more special, it is marked by a different beginning. (Trans.)

these verses at the time, but it equally applies to anyone with the same qualities. It explains why a burning fire has been prepared for them: because of their rejection of the Hour.

The verse also names "the Hour" instead of using a pronoun. This makes the statement more direct and explicit, which complies with the verse's context of threat and warning.

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إِذا رَأَتْهُمْ مِنْ مَكانٍ بَعِيدٍ سَمِعُوا لَها تَغَيُّظاً وَ زَفِيراً ﴿١٢﴾

(25:12) ***When it shall see them from a distant place, they shall hear its vehement raging*** **(taghayyuẓan)** ***and roaring*** **(zafīran).**

Al-Mufradāt says:

Ghayẓ means "intense anger"… *Taghayyuẓ* is "to show *ghayẓ*." Sometimes this is accompanied by a sound that is heard, as He says: *they shall hear its vehement raging and roaring* (25:12)…

Zafīr is "inhalation and exhalation by which the ribs expand."

This verse provides an analogy for the Fire when the disbelievers are exposed and presented to it on the Day of Retribution. It shall be like a ferocious lion that roars when it sees its prey.

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وَ إِذا أُلْقُوا مِنْها مَكاناً ضَيِّقاً مُقَرَّنِينَ دَعَوْا هُنالِكَ ثُبُوراً ﴿١٣﴾

(25:13) ***And when they are cast into a narrow place*** **(makānan)** ***in it, bound*** **(muqarranīn, from taqrīn),** ***they shall there call out for [their own] destruction*** **(thubūran).**

Thubūr has two meanings: *wayl* (wow) and *halāk* (destruction, loss). *Taqrīn* means "to bind with chains and shackles." Some have said that it means "being made companions (sing. *qarīn*) with devils." However, this meaning cannot be easily inferred from the verse's wording. There is an implied preposition, which is *fī* (lit. "in"), before *makān* (place) that is omitted. That is why *makānan* is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection.[1]

The verse means: And when they are cast in a narrow place in the Fire, while being bound by chains, at that point they will yell a call of destruction that is indescribable. That will be a call of, "Woe! We are doomed!" (*wā thubūrāh*).

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1 In other words, the word "into" in "*they are cast into a narrow place*" is not really stated in the original Arabic, but the text implies it because otherwise the sentence would be disjointed. (Trans.)

لا تَدْعُوا الْيَوْمَ ثُبُوراً واحِداً وَ ادْعُوا ثُبُوراً كَثِيراً ﴿١٤﴾

(25:14) *Call not this day for one destruction, but call for destructions many.*

Expressing one's woe and misery [by saying *wā thubūrāh*] is a way of asking for help; it is an attempt to be rescued from difficulty. However, that shall be a day of retribution only, which means that it is no longer a time for actions that would help and benefit the person. Thus, the disbelievers' call for destruction will certainly not benefit them whatsoever. That is why God says: *Call not this day for one destruction*. This implies that such call for woe and destruction will not benefit them, whether they say it much or little. It is equivalent to what they shall be told: *Enter into it, then bear (it) patiently, or do not bear (it) patiently, it is the same to you* (52:16), and what they shall say themselves: *It is the same to us whether we are impatient (now) or patient, there is no place for us to fly to* (14:21).

Some exegetes have said: "This is a way of saying that their punishment is long and everlasting, such that it does not finish by a single call for destruction, but it requires several calls of destruction." However, this is an unlikely interpretation.

قُلْ أَ ذلِكَ خَيْرٌ أَمْ جَنَّةُ الْخُلْدِ الَّتِي وُعِدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ كانَتْ لَهُمْ جَزاءً وَ مَصِيراً ﴿١٥﴾ لَهُمْ فِيها ما يَشاؤُنَ خالِدِينَ كانَ عَلى رَبِّكَ وَعْداً مَسْؤُلاً ﴿١٦﴾

(25:15-16) *Say: Is this better or the abiding garden* (jannat al-khuld) *which those who guard (against evil) are promised? That shall be a reward and a resort for them. They shall have therein what they wish abiding (in it); it is a promise upon your Lord, to be asked.*

The demonstrative pronoun "this" in "*Say: Is this*" (25:15) refers to the "burning fire" (*saʿīr*) which was mentioned and described in the previous verses [25:11ff]. God orders His Prophet to ask the disbelievers, "Which one is more preferred: the burning fire or the abiding garden?" This is a self-evident matter that does not require contemplation. In a context of debate and argument, such a question places the opponent between two options to choose from: one that is evidently true, and one that is evidently false. If he chooses the truth, then he must abandon his previous stance and admit defeat. If he chooses the false, then it is a shameless lie.

Khuld means *dawām* (continuity, abidance, eternity). The term *jannat al-khuld* (lit. "garden of eternity") shows that the garden is itself eternal

and unending. Similarly, "abiding" (*khālidīn*) in verse 25:16 shows that the inhabitants of that garden will also be eternal and completely secure from perishing.

***… those who guard (against evil) are promised* (wuʿida, from waʿada)…:** The verb *waʿada* (to promise) is ditransitive [that is, it takes two objects]. This means that its first object is omitted. What is meant is "those who guard (against evil) are promised it" (*wuʿidahā al-muttaqūn*), where the pronoun "it" (the suffix *hā* in *wuʿidahā*) is implied and omitted. The pronoun "it" would refer to the garden.

… That shall be a reward and a resort for them: The garden shall be the believers' reward for their *taqwā* (guarding against evil, Godwariness, self-restraint). That is where they shall reside in the afterlife, for being *muttaqūn* (possessors of *taqwā*). God says: *Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in the midst of gardens and fountains… nor shall they be ever ejected from it* (15:45-48). This is one of the definite verdicts that God made when He created Adam and ordered the angels and Iblīs (Satan) to prostrate to him. At that point He determined the reward and fate of those who guard against evil, as we discussed in Chapter 15 (Sūrah al-Ḥijr).

They shall have therein what they wish abiding (in it)…: God will empower the believers and give them the authority to have everything that they wish in Paradise. This is unlike the inhabitants of hell, about whom God says: *And a barrier shall be placed between them and that which they desire* (34:54). What the people of Paradise wish is what they like, and what they like is only that which, in reality, is worthy of being desired. That is what God likes and pleases for them. It is the good and happiness which they deserve. It is what makes them grow in perfection, without being of any harm to them or others.

Hence, even though the verse states "*what they wish*" in an absolute and unconditional form, we should bear in mind that they will only wish for what God pleases. This explanation should clarify the several questions that are raised concerning such verses that talk about unconditional fulfilment of wishes [in Paradise]. For example, it is said that if they can wish anything, then: (1) they might wish for some sin, evil, indecency or vanity; (2) they might wish for something that bothers the other inhabitants of Paradise; (3) they might wish for the deliverance of some of those who are sentenced to hell forever; (4) they might wish for the stations of the prophets and chosen saints that are above them in rank.

However, how can these ever occur? Because God says [about them]: *O soul that art at rest! Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with him), well-pleasing (Him). So enter among My servants, and enter into My garden* (89:27-30). The

believers are pleased with what God has endorsed, and they are pleasing to God, meaning that they do not want anything that God does not please. Hence, they will not wish for any sin, evil, indecency, vanity or lie. They will not want anything that will dissatisfy the other inhabitants of Paradise. They will not wish for the cancellation of punishment of those whom their Lord has decreed to be punished. Finally, they will not wish or desire the station of those who are above them, because their position is what their Lord has given them, and they are pleased with what He has done. They like what *He* likes.

… it is a promise upon your Lord, to be asked **(masʾūlan)*:*** This promise that God has given, to those who guard themselves, is a promise that He must fulfil. God has taken this promise upon Himself when He decreed it upon the onset of creation. He has informed us of His decree in verses like: *And most surely there is an excellent resort for those who guard (against evil): The gardens of perpetuity… This is what you are promised for the Day of Reckoning* (38:49-53).

There are a few possible explanations for why this promise is called *masʾūlan* (lit. "requested, asked for, prayed for") is: (1) Those who guard themselves had asked for its fulfilment [implicitly] through their state of being and capacity. (2) They had asked for it [explicitly and verbally] through their supplications. (3) The angels had asked for it [to be given to the believers], as God narrates from them: *Our Lord! And make them enter the gardens of perpetuity* (40:8). All of these points can be true.

As al-Ṭabrisī (r) has noted, "*That shall be a reward and a resort for them*" (25:15) is an adverbial clause which describes the condition (*ḥāl*) of the "garden"—the garden being is implied in: *which those who guard (against evil) are promised* (25:15). Then "*They shall have therein what they wish*" (25:16) is an adverbial clause which describes the condition of: *those who guard (against evil)* (25:15). This is more apparent than what others have said—that both sentences are independent statements that serve to explain and justify an implied question.[1]

وَ يَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ وَ ما يَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَقُولُ أَ أَنْتُمْ أَضْلَلْتُمْ عِبادِي

1 Al-Ṭabrisī's point which the author has preferred can be summarized as follows: "Those who guard (against evil) are promised a garden, *while that garden* shall be a reward and a resort for them, and *while those who guard themselves* shall have therein what they wish." The other view can be reduced to: "Those who guard (against evil) are promised a garden, *because* that shall be a reward and a resort for them. *This is indeed better because* they shall have therein what they wish." (Trans.)

هؤُلاءِ أَمْ هُمْ ضَلُّوا السَّبِيلَ ﴿١٧﴾

(25:17) ***And on the day when He shall gather them, and whatever* (mā) *they serve besides Allah, He shall say: Was it you who led astray these My servants, or did they themselves go astray from the path?***

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The plural pronouns (them, they, these) and conjugations[1] in the verse refer to the disbelievers. If we assume that the particle *mā* (lit. "what, that") is used exclusively in reference to unintelligent beings, then "*whatever they serve*" would refer only to the idols; but if *mā* also includes intelligent beings, then the phrase would also include the angels and humans whom they worshiped. The demonstrative pronoun "these" in "*these My servants*" (that is, "these servants of Mine") refers to the disbelievers. The meaning of the verse is clear.

قالُوا سُبْحانَكَ ما كانَ يَنْبَغِي لَنا أَنْ نَتَّخِذَ مِنْ دُونِكَ مِنْ أَوْلِياءَ وَ لكِنْ مَتَّعْتَهُمْ وَ آباءَهُمْ حَتَّى نَسُوا الذِّكْرَ وَ كانُوا قَوْماً بُوراً ﴿١٨﴾

(25:18) ***They shall say: Glory be to Thee; it was not beseeming for us that we should take any guardians besides Thee, but Thou didst make them and their fathers to enjoy until they forsook the reminder, and they were a people in perdition.***

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This verse narrates the answer of those whom the disbelievers served to the question in the last verse: *Was it you who led astray these My servants…?* Servitude to God dictates that whenever there is a mention of association and partnership with God, whether explicit or implicit, one would begin by glorifying God. That is why they will start their answer by glorification.

… it was not beseeming for us that we should take any guardians besides Thee…: That is to mean: It was not appropriate or befitting for us to leave You for someone else and adopt another guardian. It was they [the disbelievers] who started worshiping us and took us as guardians besides You.

***… but Thou didst make them and their fathers to enjoy until they forsook the reminder, and they were a people in perdition* (būrān):** *Būr* is the plural of *bāʾir*, which means *hālik* (destroyed, lost) or *fāsid* (ruined, corrupt, decayed, wicked).

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1 That is: *yaḥshuruhum* (gather them), *yaʿbudūna* (they serve), *hum* (they) and *ḍallū* (they themselves went astray). (Trans.)

After avoiding to take responsibility for misleading their worshipers, the worshiped beings (who were asked why their servants went astray) attribute the error to the disbelievers themselves. They also say that what misled the worshipers was that they were a lost or corrupt people. They tell God: You bestowed the bounties and enjoyments of this worldly life upon them and their fathers, and extended their period of enjoyment. You did so only as a means of test and trial, but the worshipers plunged into this enjoyment and became totally engaged in worldly life, to the point that they forgot the reminder that was brought to them by the messengers. Thus they deviated from monotheism to polytheism.

In other words, being lost or corrupt caused the polytheists to dedicate themselves to this world, and to plunge into their desires. They become absorbed in worldly enjoyment and directed their attention solely to engagement with the apparent means and instruments [of this life], making them oblivious to the reminder of God. That is how they deviated from monotheism to polytheism. The above explanation should clarify that the last part of the verse—"*and they were a people in perdition*"—is a continuation of the response given by the worshiped beings.[1]

Some have said: The last sentence is an extra statement that is mentioned at the end [by the worshiped beings] for clarification. It points to the *real cause* behind the straying of the polytheists. They went astray because they were inherently wretched and doomed, which can only be by a definite decree from God in His pre-eternal knowledge. This means that God is really the One Who misled the polytheists, although the verse attributes this to the polytheists themselves out of courtesy to God.

There are a few problems with this view:

(1) It ruins the meaning of the verse. If that were the real answer, then it would be unnecessary and pointless to say: *but Thou didst make them and their fathers to enjoy until they forsook the reminder*.

(2) Attributing perdition and wretchedness to the essence of things [for example, the polytheists] violates the effectiveness of education and discipline, which is agreed upon by all rational beings, complies with the innate human nature (*fiṭrah*), and is confirmed by empirical evidence. Moreover, the above interpretation contradicts both *ikhtiyār* (free will, choice) and *jabr* (compulsion, determinism). The way it contradicts *ikhtiyār* is obvious, but it also contradicts *jabr* because the advocates of *jabr* hold the Necessary

1 In other words, the last sentence adds to "until." The meaning is: "You made them and their fathers to enjoy until they forsook the reminder, and until they ended up in perdition." (Trans.)

Being as the *only* cause of *all* events. The above answer, however, attributes the cause of perdition and/or error to the essence and quiddity of things, which contradicts the exclusive view of *jabr*.

(3) It involves a confused application of God's decree (*qaḍāʾ*). When God decrees an action, it does not necessarily mean that its actor is now forced to it without his own free will and choice. Rather, God's decree also specifies *how* an action will materialize, part of which is that it emanates from the recipient's free will. God decrees the act to occur through the means and channel of the person's will. Hence, being an object of God's decree actually reinforces the aspect of using one's free will, as opposed to rendering it as without free will.[1]

(4) Based on the above interpretation, the one who has really led the disbelievers astray is God, but this is attributed to the disbelievers themselves out of courtesy. Similarly, concerning the attribution of sins, evil acts, indecencies and heinous crimes to their subjects, it is said that such acts are all among God's actions that have been attributed to others [that is, the sinners, evildoers and criminals] out of *adab* (courtesy, good manners). However, this is a self-contradictory statement. As we said in our elaborate discussion on good manners (*adab*) at the end of chapter 5,[2] *adab* is a good and proper way that befits to be followed in performing some action. In other words, courtesy means "elegance of action" (*ẓirāfat al-fiʿl*). If the clear truth about an evil act is that it is caused by God without the involvement of anyone else in it in any perceivable way, then attributing the action to anyone other than God would be a false and invalid attribution. It would be a lie that does not match reality. I wish I could understand this: What kind of good manner would reject clear truth and replace it with falsehood? What elegance or courtesy exists in lie and libel? What is the beauty of accusing someone for an act that is done by someone else?

God is greater than being glorified through falsehood, through covering some of His actions, or through lie and libel by attributing His acts to others. If it is true that He is Beautiful and thus He does only that which is beautiful, then what does it mean to dissociate some of His actions from Him in order to be courteous?

فَقَدْ كَذَّبُوكُمْ بِما تَقُولُونَ فَما تَسْتَطِيعُونَ صَرْفاً وَ لا نَصْراً وَ مَنْ يَظْلِمْ

1 In other words, our free will is decreed by God. We are compelled to have choice. Our volition is not parallel and a rival to God's decree, but it is itself decreed by God and subject to it. (Trans.)

2 See volume 12, pp. 76ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

مِنْكُمْ نُذِقْهُ عَذاباً كَبِيراً ﴿١٩﴾

(25:19) ***So they shall indeed deny you in what you say, then you shall not be able*** **(fa-lā tastaṭīʿūna)** ***to ward off*** **(ṣarfan)** ***or help*** **(naṣran),** ***and whoever among you is unjust, We will make him taste a great chastisement.***

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The speaker in this verse is God, where He addresses the polytheists once their gods dissociate themselves from them and leave them on their own. The last speech of the worshiped beings was: *and they were a people in perdition* (25:18).

The meaning of the verse is: Those whom you used to serve shall indeed deny you—with regards to your claim that they are gods besides Allah, who can help their worshipers and ward off evil from them. Since they shall reject your claim and deny that they are gods or guardians, you shall not be able to ward off the punishment from yourselves for serving them, nor will you find any help for yourselves through their means.

Apparently, the uncertainty involved in "*ward off or help*" in the verse refers to two ways of protection against the punishment: one is when the gods protect their worshipers independently, which is called *ṣarf* (warding off); and the other is when the gods do so not independently, but only as part of the cause, which is called *naṣr* (helping).

The other reciters of the Qur'an—besides Ḥafṣ who has narrated from ʿĀṣim—have read the verse as: *yastaṭīʿūna* (they shall not be able) instead of *tastaṭīʿūna* (you shall not be able). This recitation makes sense in terms of meaning, and complies with the theme of the verse. The meaning of the verse would then be: Those whom you used to serve and worship shall indeed deny you with regards to your claim that they are gods who can help their worshipers and ward off evil from them. As a result, they shall not be able to ward off the punishment from you or help you whatsoever.

… and whoever among you is unjust, We will make him taste a great chastisement: This sentence involves a generalization of meaning, where "injustice" includes *all* forms of wrongdoing or disobedience, even though the previous verses were about polytheism as a *specific* type of injustice.[1] The basis for this generalization is the universal tone of this expression. The audience of this verse on the Day of Resurrection will all be guilty of polytheism. Therefore, if the sentence were about their practice of polytheism in particular, the verse should have said, "and because of your injustice, We

1 See verse 31:13. (Trans.)

make you taste a great chastisement." However, the expression is stated as a universal law instead of a particular one.[1]

The point in having this statement in the verse is to indicate that God's decree is binding, and is executed without being blocked or delayed by anything or anyone. It is as if the verse is saying: (1) Those whom you served will deny you and will not be able to defend or help you. (2) This proves that nothing can block or postpone the application and execution of God's universal law, which is: *whoever among you is unjust, We will make him taste a great chastisement*. (3) Hence, you shall inevitably taste the punishment.

وَ ما أَرْسَلْنا قَبْلَكَ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلاَّ إِنَّهُمْ لَيَأْكُلُونَ الطَّعامَ وَ يَمْشُونَ فِي الْأَسْواقِ وَ جَعَلْنا بَعْضَكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ فِتْنَةً أَ تَصْبِرُونَ وَ كانَ رَبُّكَ بَصِيراً ﴿٢٠﴾

(25:20) ***And We have not sent before you any messengers but they most surely ate food and went about in the markets; and We have made some of you a trial for others; will you bear patiently? And your Lord is ever Seeing.***

This verse is God's second response to the disbelievers' objection of: *What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats food and goes about in the markets…* (25:7). His first response was: *Blessed is He Who, if He will, shall give you what is better than this…* (25:10), followed by: *Nay, they reject the Hour…* (25:11).

This verse [25:20] is effectively saying: This Messenger is not the first messenger that has been sent to the people. Rather, God sent a large number of messengers before him, and they were all characterized by every ordinary human quality and practice that is common among the people. They all used to eat food and go to the markets; God did not create a garden for them to eat from; neither did He cast a treasure upon them; nor did He send an angel with them. And this Messenger is just like them. He has not come with anything unprecedented, so that he may be expected to exhibit something that was not expected from the other prophets.

Therefore, this verse is equivalent in meaning to these verses: *Say: I am not the first of the messengers, and I do not know what will be done with me or with you: I do not follow anything but that which is revealed to me* (46:9),

1 This sentence, at the end of the verse, is effectively a *conditional statement* which is addressed to an audience who were all guilty of polytheism. Given its conditional import, the meaning of "injustice" cannot be restricted to polytheism. (Trans.)

and: *Say: I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me* (18:110).

One might object: Based on the above explanation, the verse [25:20] responds to the disbelievers' objection against the Prophet by referring to the case of all messengers in general. However, the disbelievers could then raise the same objection against all messengers. In fact, the disbelievers in the previous nations had the same objection against their prophets, as God narrates from them: *but they said: Shall a mortal guide us?* (64:6), *They said: You are nothing but mortals like us* (14:10), and: *This is nothing but a mortal like yourselves, eating of what you eat from and drinking of what you drink* (23:33). Therefore, the above answer does not really solve the problem.

The answer to this objection is: The verse's answer is in accordance with the disbelievers' objection, because their criticism was particularly directed at the Prophet: *What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats food…* (25:7). Now, if one wants to generalize the objection to others, then that can be answered by the verses discussed above: *Nay, they reject the Hour…* (25:11), and: *He has revealed it Who knows the secret…* (25:6), as we explained them.

Here are two other suggested interpretations by the exegetes:

(1) The purpose of the verse is to comfort the Prophet. It is as if the verse is saying: "The messengers before you were the same as you are, so there should be a good example for you in them."

(2) The verse is a response to the disbelievers' challenge and defiance.

The first interpretation is rather strange. The second one is not true either, as it is not supported by the theme of the verses. Their defiance was rather addressed and answered by the verse: *See what likenesses do they apply to you…* (25:9).

… and We have made some of you a trial for others; will you bear patiently?…: This sentence serves as an explanation and justification for the previous statement, which was about the messengers being like the rest of the people, having ordinary human qualities, and not having a different life from them. The messengers were not endowed with supernatural powers that would leave no doubt for the people about their divine mission; such as having an angel sent to them, a treasure cast upon them, or a garden created for them. Here, the verse is effectively saying: The reason why the messengers have the same life as the rest of the people is that We have made some of the people as a means of test for others, so that they may be tried. The messengers are a trial for the rest of the people, by which they are tested. This test separates between the skeptics and the believers. It distinguishes those who follow their own desires and are not patient with the bitterness of the truth, from those who seek the truth and are patient in the way of obeying God and pursuing His path.

Given the above explanation, the following points should be clear:

(1) Patience, in this verse, includes all types of patience, which are: (i) patience in obeying God; (ii) patience against disobeying Him; and (iii) patience in difficulties and calamities.

(2) The verse is about something particular, although it is expressed as a general rule: *and We have made some of you a trial for others*. The universal statement here refers particularly to God's trial of the people through the messengers and their qualities.

… And your Lord is ever Seeing: God knows what is appropriate in every matter. Thus, He sets everything in its proper position and runs the most perfect system. The purpose of the system in governing the humans is that all individuals should achieve the perfection that they deserve and call for, by pursuing either the path of felicity or that of wretchedness. This requires a system of test and trial among them, which, in turn, requires the lifting of distinction between God's messengers and others.

In this sentence, God is mentioned in third person, as opposed to first person in the previous parts. The shift is similar to what we saw above in the verse: *Blessed is He Who, if He will, shall give you…* (25:10).[1]

Examining Narrations

(1) Ibn ʿAbbās said: The chiefs of polytheists in Mecca[2] gathered together and said among themselves, "Let us summon Muḥammad, to talk and debate with him, finish our argument against him, and leave him no excuse against us." Thus, they sent someone to him with the message that "the chiefs of your tribe have gathered together and want to talk with you."

When the Messenger of God went to them, they said, "O Muḥammad! We have summoned you here in order to leave you no excuse. If you have come up with this claim [of prophethood and receiving revelation] because you want money, then we will raise money for you. If you want a high position, then we will make you our leader. And if you want kingdom, then we will make you

1 As the author explained under verse 25:10, this change of person shows the unworthiness of the polytheists for being addressed by God and His Messenger. (Trans.)

2 The narration lists them all: ʿUtbah and Shaybah b. Rabīʿah, Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb, Naḍ b. al-Ḥārith, Abū al-Bakhtarī, al-Aswad b. al-Muṭṭalib, Zamʿat b. al-Aswad, al-Walīd b. Mughīrah, Abū Jahl b. Hishām, ʿAbd-Allāh b. Umayyah, Umayyat b. Khalaf, al-ʿĀṣ b. Wāʾil, and Nabīh b. al-Ḥajjāj. (Trans.)

our king."

The Messenger of God replied, "None of what you said is applicable to me. I have not brought what I have brought because I want your wealth, position, or kingdom. God has sent me as a messenger to you. He has sent a Book upon me, and has ordered me to be a bearer of glad tidings and warning to you. I have conveyed my Lord's message to you and have advised you with sincerity. Now, if you accept what I have brought to you, then that shall be your [true and remaining] share in this world and the hereafter. And if you reject it back to me, then I shall wait for God's decree—until God may judge between me and you."

They said, "O Muḥammad! If you do not accept what we have offered you, then ask something for yourself: ask your Lord to send an angel with you that would confirm you in what you say, and would turn us away from [criticizing] you. Ask Him to make gardens and palaces of gold and silver for you, so that you will no longer need to go to the markets in order to make a living like us. This way we will realize your superiority and your position with your Lord—that is *if* you are a messenger as you claim to be."

The Messenger of God replied, "I shall not do so. I am not someone who would ask his Lord for these things. I have not been sent to you with these things, but God has sent me as a bearer of glad tidings and warning."

Thus, God revealed about their requests: *And they say: What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats food* (25:7) up to: *and We have made some of you a trial for others; will you bear patiently? And your Lord is ever Seeing* (25:20). It means: "I made some of you a trial for others so that you may bear patiently. Had I wanted to give this world to My Messenger so that you would not deviate from him, I would have done so."[1]

The Messenger of God said, "Whoever forges a lie against me[2] should take their seat between the two eyes of hell." They [the Companions] asked him, "O Messenger of God! Does hell have eyes?" He replied, "Have you not heard God saying: *When it shall see them from a distant place* (25:12)? Does it see them with anything

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Isḥāq, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn al-Mundhir.

2 In other words, "whoever makes up a hadith and attributes it to me…" (Trans.)

but with two eyes?"[1]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has also narrated this from a man among the Companions. However, the argument presented in this narration is not clear.

(2) Once the Messenger of God was asked about the verse: *And when they are cast into a narrow place in it, bound* (25:13). He said: By the One Who holds my life in His hand, they shall be forced into hell [in a tight place] as a nail is forced into a wall.[2]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Makḥūl, on the authority of Abū Umāmah.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of Yaḥyā b. Abī Usayd.

Verses 21-31

These verses narrate another objection that the polytheists raised against God's Messenger, concerning his mission. The gist of their argument was: Suppose that it is possible for a human being to be a messenger, meaning that an angel descends upon him with revelations from God, or he sees God and He talks to him through revelation. If this is possible for him, then inasmuch as he is a human being, he is no different from the rest of humankind. Thus, if his claim to be a messenger is true, then we—or some of us—should also be able to see what he claims to see, and should also find in ourselves what he feels in himself.

As a matter of fact, the people of the previous prophets also raised the same objection against them, as God narrates: *They said: You are nothing but mortals like us* (14:10). We have already explained this line of argument repeatedly.

The above argument by the disbelievers complements their previous objection: *What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats food* (25:7). Both of these objections boil down to one argument, which traps the opponent between two unwanted consequences. The argument can be summarized as follows: The mission claimed by this "messenger" is either (a) a heavenly bounty and a connection to the unseen; or (b) a specific position that humankind qua humankind can achieve. (a) If it is the former, then human beings cannot have a share of it inasmuch as they are human beings. Thus, an angel must come down to him to accompany him in his message of warning; or a treasure should be sent down to him; or he must be given a garden to eat from [25:7-8]. (b) If it is the latter, then why do we not find the same connection in ourselves? That is why the demanded: *Why have not angels been sent down upon us, or (why) do we not see our Lord?* (25:21).

We saw and discussed God's answer to the first part of the argument in the verses above. As with the second part, He says that they [the polytheists] too shall see the angels, but in realm other than this world. This answer is equivalent to His words: *We do not send the angels but with truth, and then they would not be respited* (15:8), and we shall elaborate it below. These verses also involve a reference to afterlife and the Day of Resurrection.

وَ قالَ الَّذِينَ لا يَرْجُونَ لِقاءَنا لَوْ لا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْنَا الْمَلائِكَةُ أَوْ نَرى رَبَّنا
لَقَدِ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَ عَتَوْا عُتُوًّا كَبِيراً ﴿٢١﴾

(25:21) *And those who do not hope* (lā yarjūna, from rajāʾ) *for Our meeting* (liqāʾanā) *say: Why have not angels been sent down upon us, or (why) do we not see our Lord? Now certainly they are too proud of themselves and have revolted in great revolt* (ʿutuwwan).

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Rajāʾ* is "the anticipation of some good which one deems to be likely to occur." It is similar to *ṭamaʿ* (desire, craving, covetousness) and *amal* (hope, prospect, ambition). *Liqāʾ* is "to end up next to something without any barrier in between." ʿUtuww means "deviation [from the truth] toward shameless and obscene wrongdoing."

The return to God on the Day of Resurrection is called *liqāʾ* (meeting), in the sense that the people will appear before God in such a way that there will be no barrier of ignorance or heedlessness between them. It refers to the manifestation of divine majesty on that day. He says: *And they shall know that Allah is the evident Truth* (24:25).

Therefore, "*do not hope for Our meeting*" refers to the disbelievers' rejection of the hereafter. Unlike what we saw previously [in verse 25:11], this verse does not talk about "denying" or "rejecting," but it talks about "not hoping." The significance of this expression is that "hope" indicates possibility. Having no hope in an event is a way of saying that the event is impossible. Therefore, the reason behind their demand—to have the angels descend upon them or to see their Lord—was that they deemed these events to be totally impossible. They pressed for these requests on the assumption that they are impossible to occur.

… Why have not angels been sent down upon us, or (why) do we not see our Lord?…: Given the above explanations, this statement is an objection that was raised against the Messenger's mission, expressed in the form of a challenge. It is similar to what is narrated from them elsewhere: *Why do you not bring to us the angels if you are of the truthful ones?* (15:7). This argument can be elaborated as follows: Suppose that divine *risālah* (messengership, mission, message)—which consists of either an angel coming down to a human being with revelation, or God speaking directly to a human being—is something that is possible for humankind. If so, then we are equally human, no less than this claimant of *risālah*. So how come no angel has come down upon us, nor have we seen our Lord? *Why have not angels been sent down upon us, or (why) do we not see our Lord?*

Note that the requests narrated in this verse are in an unconditional form. The disbelievers did not qualify their demands by saying. "Why have not angels been sent down upon us *to confirm you*, or why do we not see our

Lord *so that He may confirm you*?" This confirms how we interpreted their argument. Not to mention that the qualified request was already narrated from them, where they said that an angel should be sent with the messenger to be a warner with him [25:7]. That implies the angel's confirmation of the Prophet.

By referring to God as "our Lord," the disbelievers were mocking the Prophet. The polytheists did not believe in God as their "Lord." Instead, their lords were those whom they worshiped, and they viewed God as the Lord of the lords. Hence, it is as if they said to the Prophet: You suppose that God is your Lord and that He has kindly chosen you to speak to you directly. Well, if that is the case, then He is also *our* Lord, so let Him kindly choose us as well; let us see Him in a direct dialogue as you do.

It should also be noted that polytheism originated by the worship of angels, the souls of the stars, and other spiritual beings. However, they then deviated to the worship of idols *representing* those beings. They wanted to worship and offer sacrifice to something that is physically visible, as opposed to something that is concealed in the unseen.[1]

… Now certainly they are too proud of themselves and have revolted in great revolt: Here God is saying: I swear that they have sought undue ascendency, have claimed unwarranted highness in themselves, and have revolted such a great revolt.

يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَ الْمَلائِكَةَ لا بُشْرى يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُجْرِمِينَ وَ يَقُولُونَ حِجْراً مَحْجُوراً ﴿٢٢﴾

(25:22) *On the day when they shall see the angels, there shall be no joy on that day for the guilty, and they shall say: A forbidden barrier!* (ḥijran maḥjūran).

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Ḥijr* means "something that is not accessible because it has been prohibited." God says: *And they say: These are cattle and tilth prohibited* (ḥijr) (6:138), and: *And they shall say: A forbidden barrier* (25:22). It was common that when someone met a person whom he did not feel secure about, he would say: *ḥijran maḥjūrā* (that

1 Thus they had a similar expectation about God. In other words, they were effectively telling the Prophet: If you say that God is our Lord Whom we should serve, then we should be able to see Him just as we see the other lords whom we serve. (Trans.)

is, "let there be a prohibiting barrier between us"). God says that the disbelievers will say this phrase when they shall see the angels, thinking that it will avail them.

It is narrated from Khalīl that in the pre-Islamic era, if someone met a person whom he feared might kill him in the sacred months, he would say: *ḥijran maḥjūrā*, meaning: "It is prohibited for you to harm me in this month, so do not start it."

It is narrated from Abū ʿUbaydah that this was a formula of protection (*ʿūḍah*) among the Arabs. They used to say it to someone that they feared because of having some bloodshed between them, when they meet him in the Sanctuary (*ḥaram*) [of Mecca] or during one of the sacred months.

On the day* (yawma) *when they shall see the angels, there shall be no joy on that day for the guilty…: It is said that "*on the day*," at the beginning of the verse, indicates the time of: *there shall be no joy*. Then the repetition of "*on that day*" (yawmaʾidh) in the middle of the verse is meant for emphasis. "*There shall be no joy*" denies the genus of joy [for those who are guilty on that day].[1] "The guilty" includes anyone who is characterized by guilt (*ijrām*, *jurm*), albeit the verse is specifically about "the guilt of polytheism," which makes "the guilty" as those who do not anticipate the meeting with God, as discussed above [25:21]. The meaning of the verse is: When these people—who do not hope for Our meeting—shall see the angels, then on that day there shall be no joy of any kind for the guilty, including these people [that is, the Arab polytheists at the time of revelation].

… and they shall say: A forbidden barrier: The pronoun "they" refers to the polytheists. It means: On that day, the polytheists will say to the angels—who want to punish them—"*ḥijran maḥjūrā*," meaning, "Let us be protected from you."

Some have said that the pronoun "they" refers to the angels. Thus, the angels shall tell the polytheists, "It is totally forbidden and prohibited (*ḥarāman muḥarramā*)," meaning one of the following: it is prohibited for you to hear any good news; (2) it is prohibited for you to enter Paradise; (3) it is prohibited for you to seek refuge from the punishment; you shall not have any protection.[2]

However, the first interpretation [that "they" refers to the polytheists] matches the theme and context of the verse better.

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1 Denying genus (*jins*) means denying all forms and kinds of something. (Trans.)

2 Another possibility is: "It is prohibited for you to return to the world." This meaning is especially possible because one of the meanings of *ḥijr* is "barrier," as used in verse 25:53 below. This idea is confirmed by verse 23:100. (Trans.)

This verse responds to the polytheists' first demand: *Why have not angels been sent down upon us* (25:21), and not their other demand: *or (why) do we not see our Lord?* (25:21). What they meant was to see God with the physical eye, which necessitates materiality and physicality, while God is transcendent and far above that. As for seeing God with the eye of conviction, meaning the heart's insight, they were not a people who could comprehend such subtlety to ask for it. Even if they did comprehend it, that is not the sense of vision that they meant [given the context of the verse and other similar verses].

Concerning the sending of angels upon the polytheists and their seeing of the angels, the verse assumes it to be certain that there will surely come a day when they shall see the angels. Therefore, instead of informing them about seeing the angels, the verse speaks about *their condition* upon seeing the angels. It clarifies that the polytheists' request to see the angels is not something to their benefit, because they shall see the angels on the day when they shall see the punishment of hell directly. Their request will be granted after this world is transformed to the realm of hereafter. God refers to this elsewhere: *We do not send the angels but with truth, and then they would not be respited* (15:8). This means that the polytheists were in fact asking for the hastening of their punishment, even though they thought that they were defeating God and His Messenger with a decisive argument.

When is this day "*when they shall see the angels*"? The exegetes have said that it is the Day of Resurrection. However, it is more likely that it refers to when the polytheists shall death, as one can derive from the context of this verse [25:22] and other verses which describe their death and what follows it. For example: *And if you had seen when the unjust shall be in the agonies of death and the angels shall spread forth their hands: Give up your souls; today shall you be recompensed with an humiliating chastisement* (6:93), and: *Surely (as for) those whom the angels cause to die while they are unjust to their souls, they shall say: In what state were you? They shall say: We were weak in the earth. They shall say: Was not Allah's earth spacious, so that you should have migrated therein?* (4:97). These verses decisively show that the polytheists shall see the angels and talk to them directly after death, and before the Day of Resurrection. This period [marked by death] is called *barzakh* in the Qur'an.[1] Note that this verse is a response to those who do not believe that they shall see the angels. Therefore, it should logically refer to the first instance when they will indeed see the angels in a way that will not

1 See verse 23:100. *Barzakh* is the intermediate realm between this world and the hereafter. (Trans.)

be pleasing to them, and that is the day of their death. It is not appropriate in the context of this debate to tell the polytheists about seeing angels on the Day of Resurrection, given that the verse then says that they will tell the angels: *A forbidden barrier!* It is most befitting for them to say this to the angels right upon their death, not the Day of Resurrection—after having seen the angels upon their death, and being punished by them for a long time. This is evident.

Therefore, this verse and the next two verses apparently talk about the condition of the people in *barzakh*. These verses describe the polytheists' encounter with the angels, the annulment of their deeds, and the condition of the people of Paradise in *barzakh*.

وَ قَدِمْنا إِلى ما عَمِلُوا مِنْ عَمَلٍ فَجَعَلْناهُ هَباءً مَنْثُوراً ﴿٢٣﴾

(25:23) *And We will proceed to what they have done of deeds* (ʿamal)*, so We shall render them as scattered floating dust* (habāʾan manthūran, from nathr).

Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufradāt*:

> *ʿAmal* refers to the action (*fiʿl*) of a living being that is done voluntarily. Therefore, *ʿamal* is more specific than *fiʿl*, because *fiʿl* is also used for involuntary actions done by animals and inanimate objects. *ʿAmal*, on the contrary, is rarely used in these cases. It is not used for animals, except for *al-baqar al-ʿawāmil* (laboring cows)…

Habāʾ refers to the tiny dust particles (dust motes) that are scattered in the air, and are only visible when a ray of sunlight shines through an opening. *Nathr* means *tafrīq* (to divide, to disperse, to separate).

The meaning of the verse is: "We shall turn to every deed that the disbelievers have done, and We shall thoroughly disperse their deeds like scattered dust, such that they would not benefit from anything that they have done." It should be noted that the condition and quality of one's life after death will be determined by one's deeds.

The above is an analogy that illustrates how God's wrath will dominate and override every act that the disbelievers performed in order to have a happy life. He will annul their deeds in a way that their actions will have no impact in their eternal bliss and well-being. God's domination is compared to the domination of a hero who defeats his enemy, enters the enemy's house, destroys the house, obliterates his works, and burns his possessions and furniture to ashes. It is a way of referring to a total effacement of every object and vestige.

There are other verses, however, which suggest that the deeds of the disbelievers are already forfeited right in this world, due to their disbelief and iniquity. This idea does not contradict what is mentioned in the current verse. What is meant here is that the *iḥbāṭ* (forfeiture, cancellation, annulment) of their deeds was *concealed* from the disbelievers while they were in this world, but it will become manifest to them afterwards. We already had a detailed discussion on "forfeiture of Deeds" under verses 2:216-218.[1] Readers who are interested to read more should refer to it.

أَصْحابُ الْجَنَّةِ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَيْرٌ مُسْتَقَرًّا وَ أَحْسَنُ مَقِيلاً ﴿٢٤﴾

(25:24) *The dwellers of the garden shall on that day be in a better* (khayr) *abiding-place* (mustaqarran) *and a better* (aḥsan) *resting-place* (maqīlan).

In this verse, "*the dwellers of the garden*" are the same as the *muttaqūn* (those who guard themselves) who were mentioned before: *Say: Is this better or the abiding garden which those who guard (against evil) are promised?* (25:15). *Mustaqarr* and *maqīl* are locative nouns. *Mustaqarr* is derived from *istiqrār* (to abide, to be fixed, to be established), and *maqīl* is derived from *qaylūlah*, which means "midday rest," irrespective of whether or not it involves sleep (although it is said that there is no sleep in Paradise).

Apparently, the words *khayr* and *aḥsan* (better, finer, fairer) in this verse are not meant in a comparative sense. Instead, their role is similar to the role of the comparative adjectives used in the following verses: *And it is easy* (ahwan) *to Him* (30:27), and: *What is with Allah is better* (khayr) *than sport* (62:11).[2]

It is also plausible, as we prefer, to say that these adjectives—which are apparently in the comparative form *afʿal*, or what is equivalent to it, like *khayr* (better)—are *ṣifah mushabbahah*.[3] In cases like this verse, these

1 See volume 3, pp. 218ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 Here is an elaboration of this view: *Ahwan* (easier) and *khayr* (better) are both comparative adjectives, but they are not meant in the comparative sense in the above verses. The reason for this in verse 30:27 is that nothing is *easier* to God than something else, because of His omnipotence. In verse 62:11, *khayr* (better) does not mean that sport is "good" but what is with God is "better." Rather, all good is with God, and there is no good in sport. (Trans.)

3 *Ṣifah mushabbahah* (also called *ṣifah mushbihah*) is an adjective that is similar to an active participle. It serves as an adjective, and it indicates the establishment, subsistence, and strength of a quality in the subject. (Trans.)

adjectives convey a comparative meaning, not because of their verbal pattern [of *afʿal*], but because of their root [which varies from one adjective to another].[1] The usage of comparison and preference here can be explained and justified as follows: Their *choice* of polytheism and wicked behavior implies that they deemed these to be *good*. However, these deeds necessitate hell in the hereafter. Therefore, the polytheists are told that the garden is *better* than the consequence of what they *chose*.[2] Either way, they must choose the garden over the fire, and belief (*īmān*) over disbelief (*kufr*).

Some exegetes have said that in cases like this, comparative adjectives are used to imply mocking and derision.[3]

وَ يَوْمَ تَشَقَّقُ السَّماءُ بِالْغَمامِ وَ نُزِّلَ الْمَلائِكَةُ تَنْزِيلاً ﴿٢٥﴾

(25:25) *And the day when the heaven shall burst asunder with the clouds, and the angels shall be sent down descending (in ranks).*

Since the inflectional mood of the word *yawma* (day) is *manṣūb*, it is apparently an object for an omitted verb that is implied: "And *remember* the day when…" This verse talks about another day when the disbelievers shall see the angels, and that is the Day of Resurrection, as shown in the next verse: *The kingdom on that day shall rightly belong to the most Merciful* (25:26). Concerning the implied verb for the word *yawma* (day) in this verse, the exegetes have made other suggestions, but there is no benefit in discussing them.

***… shall burst asunder* (tashaqqaqu) *with the clouds* (bil-ghamām)…:** The original form of this word is *tatashaqqaqu* [but the first letter *tāʾ* is dropped in contraction]. It follows the verbal pattern *tafaʿʿul*, derived from

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1 In other words, one should look at the context to see in what sense a comparative meaning can be justified. Otherwise, the mere verbal pattern of *afʿal* does not show that both sides of the comparison really possess the root quality. A counter example is this very verse, because the use of "better" does not mean that their deeds and ends are "really good" but they are good only in their impression and assumption. (Trans.)

2 They subscribed to polytheism and wickedness, which result in hell as a consequence. The meaning would be: "Even if we grant that polytheism and wickedness are good, they are not worthy of being chosen because they are inseparable from hell as their consequence. The garden, which is a consequence of belief and Godwariness, is a much better choice. (Trans.)

3 In this case the verse would be saying mockingly, "Such good place to abide and rest do the dwellers of hell have!" and then adding earnestly, "The dwellers of the garden…" (Trans.)

the root *shaqq*, which means *kharm* (to pierce, to split, to tear). *Tashaqquq* means *tafattuḥ* (to open, to cleave, to unfold). *Ghamām* means "cloud," in the sense that the cloud covers and blocks the light of the sun. *Ghamām* is derived from *ghamm*, which means *satr* (to cover, to veil).

There are two possible meanings for the preposition *bāʾ* in *bil-ghamām*:

(1) It indicates *mulābasah* (association, accompanying circumstance). The meaning of the verse would be: The heaven shall split open, while it is covered by clouds (that is, while it is cloudy).

(2) It means *ʿan* (of, from, through). The meaning would be: The heaven shall split open through the clouds, meaning that its opening will begin by the clouds or by the parting of the clouds.

Either way, the apparent meaning of the verse is that the heaven—including the clouds that cover it—will split apart on the Day of Resurrection. Then the angels that inhabit the heaven will descend from it, and the people will see them. Therefore, this verse is similar in meaning to these verses: *And the heaven shall cleave asunder, so that on that day it shall be frail. And the angels shall be on the sides thereof* (69:16-17).

It is quite possible that what is said in this verse is meant in a metaphorical sense, where "clouds" refer to the veils of ignorance, and "the heaven" refers to part of the unseen which shall appear. Then the inhabitants of that realm, which are called "the angels" will come into view and will descent to the realm of the earth, which is the human world.

According to some exegetes, this verse is similar to the verse: *They do not wait aught but that Allah should come to them in the shadows of the clouds along with the angels, and the matter has (already) been decided; and (all) matters are returned to Allah* (2:210). Therefore, what is meant here is that the clouds will split the heaven open. We already discussed this idea in our exposition of verse 2:210.[1]

Referring to the Resurrection by the word *tashaqquq* (to burst asunder), instead of other words like *tafattuḥ* (to open up), is meant to convey a sense of terror. The same goes for using the indefinite form of the word *tanzīlān*, which conveys magnification and exaggeration.[2]

الْمُلْكُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ لِلرَّحْمٰنِ وَ كَانَ يَوْماً عَلَى الْكافِرِينَ عَسِيراً ﴿٢٦﴾

(25:26) *The kingdom on that day* (yawmaʾidh) *shall rightly belong to the most Merciful, and a hard day shall it be for the disbelievers.*

1 See volume 3, pp. 135ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 That is: The angels shall be sent down; such a mighty descending. (Trans.)

That is: On that day, absolute and unconditional kingdom will be an established right of the most Merciful. This refers to the cancellation of the apparent means, and the disappearance of the connections between the various causes and effects in this world. As we have repeatedly said, what happens on the Day of Resurrection is the *appearance* of, and *realization* that, all rules, kingdoms and affairs are in the hands of God alone; and that no force, means or factor is independent in its effects. This is contrary to the apparent state of affairs that is visible to the eye in this world, before the occurrence of the Hour and before the return of everything to Him.

… and a hard day shall it be for the disbelievers: It will be a hard day for them because they relied on the apparent means during their lifetime, and plunged into the earthly life which is transitory and short-lived. Thus, they severed their tie with the true Cause of all events, Who is the real possessor of all kingdom. They cut themselves from their everlasting life and eternal bliss. That is why on that day they shall have no refuge or shelter.

Given the above explanations, *al-mulk* (the kingdom) is the subject, and *al-ḥaqq* (the right, the truth) is its predicate. The definite form of *al-ḥaqq* shows exclusivity. "On that day" (*yawmaʾidh*) is the temporal container for the abovementioned subject and predicate.[1] What is meant by this qualification—"*on that day*—is that this fact will *manifest and appear* on that day. Otherwise, the kingdom *always* belongs to God. What distinguishes the Day of Resurrection is that it is that the means, forces and factors of the other realms fade away at that point. They no longer wield the power, influence and authority which they seemed to have on the surface.

Here are some other interpretations by the exegetes:

(1) *Mulk* (kingdom, sovereignty) in the verse means *mālikiyyah* (ownership, possession); its object is "that day"; and *al-ḥaqq* is the predicate of al-*mulk*.[2]

(2) "On that day" is the container of an omitted attribute of *al-ḥaqq*.[3]

(3) "On that day" means "the Day of God" (*yawm Allāh*).

(4) *Yawmaʾidh* is the predicate of *al-mulk*, and *al-ḥaqq* is an attribute

1 In other words, *yawmaʾidh* marks the time of the above statement. The meaning is: On that day the kingdom is the truth, and this one and only truth belongs to the most Merciful. (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: The ownership of that day is the right of the most Merciful. (Trans.)

3 The meaning could be something like: The kingdom shall be the evident truth of that day, which belongs to the most Merciful. (Trans.)

for the subject [*al-mulk*].[1]

These are all implausible views that are not worthy of discussion [given the context of the verse and our exposition above].[2]

وَ يَوْمَ يَعَضُّ الظَّالِمُ عَلى يَدَيْهِ يَقُولُ يا لَيْتَنِي اتَّخَذْتُ مَعَ الرَّسُولِ سَبِيلاً ﴿٢٧﴾

(25:27) *And the day when the unjust one shall bite* (ya^{c}aḍḍ**u, from ^{c}a**ḍḍ**) *his hands saying: O! Would that I had taken a way with the Messenger!***

Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufradāt*:

^{c}Aḍḍ means "to bite with the teeth." He says: *They [the People of the Book] bite the ends of their fingers in rage against you* (3:119), and: *And the day when the unjust one shall bite…* (25:27). This is an expression for remorse and regret, as per a common practice of people who bite their fingers when they are regretful.

This regret is reflected in what God narrates from them at the end of the verse and in the next verse: *O woe is me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend!* (25:28). The disbelievers will wish that they had not missed their obligatory duties.

Apparently, "the unjust" in this verse has a generic meaning. It includes anyone who does not follow the messenger's guidance. Similarly, "the messenger" is also meant in a generic sense. Nevertheless, even though "the unjust" and "the messenger" are meant as general titles, at the time of revelation, they particularly applied to "the unjust in this nation" and "Muḥammad", respectively.

The meaning of the verse is: And remember the day when the unjust shall regret immensely, and shall say out of the intensity of their remorse: "O, I wish I had taken some way with the messenger; any way [with the messenger] would be better than this."[3]

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1 The meaning would be: True kingdom that belongs to the most Merciful will be on that day. (Trans.)

2 Most English translations have interpreted *al-ḥaqq* (true) to be an adjective for *al-mulk* (kingdom), where they are separated by *yawma'idh* (on that day). This is arguably the most apparent and straightforward meaning for the verse, which springs to the mind at first. It is also confirmed by the definite form of *al-mulk* and *al-ḥaqq*. The meaning would be: On that day, true kingdom will belong to the most Merciful. (Trans.)

3 "Any way" is inferred from the indefinite form of the word *sabīlan* (a way, some path). (Trans.)

يا وَيْلَتى لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلاناً خَلِيلاً ﴿٢٨﴾

(25:28) ***O woe is me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so*** **(fulānan)** ***for a friend!***

This verse is a continuation of the wish of the unjust person who shall grieve over his iniquity. *Fulān* (so-and-so) is an indirect and ambiguous way of talking about a male person. *Fulānah* is the same, but for a female. Al-Rāghib says, "*Fulān* and *fulānah* allude to human beings, while *al-fulān* and *al-fulānah* (with the article *al-*) allude to animals."

The meaning of the verse is: "Woe is me! Such a disaster! I wish I had not chosen so-and-so as a friend." This refers to someone that the person had befriended, had sought advice from, had listened to, and had wrongly followed.

One exegete has said that "so-and-so" (*fulān*) in the verse refers to Satan. Apparently, he made this interpretation based on the next verse, which talks about Satan forsaking the people. However, the thread and context of the verses do not support this interpretation.

The wording of this verse and the last one involve two subtle points: (1) The exclamation *yā* (O, Oh) is used to call someone, but in the last verse the sinners just say *yā*, without identifying whom they are calling: *yā laytanī*, "O! would that I…" (25:27). This shows that they look for *any* means of rescue that can deliver them from their wretchedness. (2) In the current verse they again say *yā*, but they call out for their own *wayl* (woe, curse, devastation) as they say: *ya waylatā*, "O woe is me" (25:28).[1] This indicates that it becomes clear to them that nothing can ever free them from the punishment except death and destruction. Therefore, the two verses show a gradual escalation of their desperation and helplessness.

لَقَدْ أَضَلَّنِي عَنِ الذِّكْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ جاءَنِي وَ كانَ الشَّيْطانُ لِلْإِنْسانِ خَذُولاً ﴿٢٩﴾

(25:29) ***Certainly he led me astray from the reminder after it had come to me; and Satan fails to aid man.***

This verse explains and justifies the wish mentioned above. The "reminder" (*dhikr*) is meant in an absolute sense, including all teachings of the messengers. It could also refer specifically to their scriptures—which, in case of Prophet Muḥammad, would be the Qur'an.

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1 *Ya waylatā* can better be translated as: "I wish I would die"; "May I perish"; "Let me be dead." (Trans.)

… and Satan fails to aid* (khadhūlan) *man: This is a comment made by God. It could also be an addition said by the unjust individual, stated out of grief and remorse.

Khudhlān refers to when one who is expected to help refuses to do so. Satan's *khudhlān* is that he promises people that if they cling to the apparent means and instruments of this world and forsake their Lord, he will aid them in every difficulty. However, when these means are severed by the appearance of God's dominance—either partially on the day of one's death, or totally on the Day of Resurrection—Satan leaves those people alone and entrusts them to misery and wretchedness. God says: *Like Satan when he says to man: Disbelieve, but when he disbelieves, he says: I am surely quit of you* (59:16). Also, part of what Satan will say [to the disbelievers] on the Day of Resurrection is, as narrates by God: *I cannot be your aider (now) nor can you be my aiders; surely I disbelieved in your associating me with Allah before* (14:22).[1]

The last three verses (25:27-29) involve an allusion, or rather a clear indication, that the main cause that leads to the error of those who err is their subscription to, and association with, people of base desires and Satan's crew. This is indeed confirmed by what we observe around us.

وَ قالَ الرَّسُولُ يا رَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي اتَّخَذُوا هذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَهْجُوراً ﴿٣٠﴾

(25:30) ***And the Messenger said: O my Lord! Surely my people have treated this Qur'an as a forsaken thing* (mahjūran, from hajr).**

"The Messenger" (*al-rasūl*) here refers to Muḥammad, because the verse specifically talks about the Qur'an. God refers to the Prophet as a "messenger" in order to assert his messengership and refute those who criticized his mission and disparaged his Book. *Hajr* means *tark* (to abandon, to leave, to forsake).

And the Messenger said…: Apparently, the conjunction "and" joins this statement to "*the unjust one shall bite…*" (25:27). Therefore, this verse states a complaint that the Messenger will make to his Lord on the Day of Resurrection. The verb "said" is used in the past tense to indicate that this event will inevitably occur. The "people" (*qawm*) of the Prophet would be either all Arabs, who were of the same race as the Prophet, or rather all of the Prophet's ummah (nation, audience),[2] on the account of including dis-

1 Also see verse 8:48. (Trans.)

2 The Prophet's ummah would be all individuals who lived during his time or later. (Trans.)

believers and wrongdoers.

Two alternative views are: (1) The conjunction "and" joins this verse to: *And those who do not hope for Our meeting say…* (25:21). (2) "And" is not meant as a conjunction, but it simply marks a new statement. Both of these views mean that the verses in between [that is, verses 25:22-25:29] were asides and parenthetical remarks.[1] However, this is unlikely, given the flow and theme of the verses. Therefore, the verb "said" (*qāla*) has its own significance, and "people" (*qawm*) refers to those who criticized the Prophet's message and derided his Book.[2]

Another weak view by some exegetes is that *mahjūr*, in the verse, is derived from *hujr*, meaning "delirium, hallucination." The unlikelihood of this view is obvious.[3]

وَ كَذٰلِكَ جَعَلْنا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوًّا مِنَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ وَ كَفى بِرَبِّكَ هادِياً وَ نَصِيراً ﴿٣١﴾

(25:31) ***And thus have We made for every prophet an enemy from among the sinners, and sufficient is your Lord as a Guide and a Helper.***

In this verse, God comforts the Prophet by saying: As We let these sinners to be your enemy, We also made enemies for all prophets from among the sinners. This is part of Our ongoing custom with all prophets and their nations. Hence, do not be grieved by their enmity that you face, and let this not be too hard on you.[4]

What is meant by "making enemies from among the sinners" is that God avenges the sinners for their disobedience by sealing their hearts. As a result, they oppose the truth and dislike the caller to truth, who is the

1 This means that the discussion of the hereafter in verses 25:22-29 was a digression. The main discussion was a description of the Prophetic mission and the people's reaction to it. Verse 25:21 narrates what the disbelievers said, and verse 25:30 narrates the Prophet's response, both pertaining to this world. (Trans.)

2 In other words, this statement is apparently the Prophet's complaint to God on the Day of Resurrection, as the author explained above. (Trans.)

3 In other words, clearly the first meaning which comes to mind is not that "the people treated this Qur'an as hallucinations," but that "the people forsook this Qur'an in terms of their beliefs and practice." (Trans.)

4 That is: You are not alone in this, nor the first one to have enemies. (Trans.)

Prophet. Therefore, their enmity can be attributed to God, in the sense that it is a matter of His retribution [for their wrongdoing and bad choice].

… and sufficient is your Lord as a Guide and a Helper: Given the context of the verse, this statement means: Let not their enmity and opposition frighten you; do not be afraid of them with regards to what happens to the people's guidance and the spread of your religion among them. This is because your Lord suffices as a Guide: He guides whoever among the people deserves guidance and is prepared for it. Even though these individuals [that is, the polytheists] may deny and defy you, the guidance of the rest of the people does not depend on their misguidance. Your Lord also suffices as a Helper: He shall help you and your religion—which He sent you with—even if these individuals restrain their support from you and your religion. Therefore, this sentence expresses the sufficiency and independence [of God, His Messenger and His religion] from the sinners.

Given the above explanation, the first part of the verse serves to comfort the Prophet, and its subsequent part implies that he is needless of the sinners among his people. This sense of God's support and sufficiency for the Prophet is confirmed by referring to God as "*your Lord*," which highlights God's attribute of Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*),[1] and ascribes it personally to the Prophet in second person.

Examining Narrations

(1) In a hadith about how a disbeliever's soul shall be seized at death, Imam al-Bāqir said: When it [the spirit] reaches the throat [56:83], the angels will hit his face and his back,[2] and he will be told: *Give up your souls; today shall you be recompensed with an ignominious chastisement because you spoke against Allah other than the truth and (because) you showed pride against His communications* (6:93). This is the meaning of His words: *On the day when they shall see the angels, there shall be no joy on that day for the guilty, and they shall say: A forbidden barrier!* (25:22). What they mean by saying this [that is, "a forbidden barrier"] is that "Paradise is absolutely forbidden and prohibited for you."[3]

(2) ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said: *Habāʾ* [used in verse 25:23] is a dusty wind

1 A "lord" (*rabb*) is an owner that cares about, fosters, manages, and directs the affairs of his property toward its growth and perfection. (Trans.)

2 See verses 8:50 and 47:27. (Trans.)

3 *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, on the authority of *al-Jannah wa al-Nār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī.

that blows and goes away, such that nothing of it remains. God shall make their deeds like that.[1]

(3) Sālim, the Mawlā (client, freedman) of Ḥudayfah has narrated from the Messenger of God: "On the Day of Resurrection, a group shall be brought forth with good deeds as high as the mountains of Tihāmah [a land extending from the Sinai Peninsula to near Yemen, including Mecca]. When they are brought forth, God will turn their deeds into dust. Then He will fling them into the Fire." Then Sālim said, "May my parents be your ransom, O Messenger of God! Please describe these people for us." The Prophet said, "They used to pray, fast, and [even] do some of the recommended rituals of the night [that is, the optional night prayer]; however, whenever they were faced with something unlawful, they would jump on it. That is why God will invalidate their [good] deeds."[2]

(4) Sulaymān b. Khālid says: Once I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about God's words: *And We will proceed to what they have done of deeds, so We shall render them as scattered floating dust* (25:23). He said, "By God, their deeds were whiter than white Egyptian veils, but whenever they came across something unlawful they would not say 'no' to it."[3]

Author's comment: This idea is narrated through more than one chain of transmission in *al-Kāfī* and other books from Imam al-Ṣadiq and his father.

(5) In a hadith describing a believer's condition when he is placed in the grave, Imam ʿAlī said: Then those two [that is, the two angels], will extend his grave as far as his eye can see. Then they will open a door to Paradise for him and tell him, "Sleep peacefully, as a healthy youth sleeps." Indeed, God says: *The dwellers of the garden shall on that day be in a better abiding-place and a better resting-place* (25:24).[4]

Author's comment: As you can see, according to this narration, this verse is among verses which talk about the *barzakh*. The part of the hadith where the believer is told, "Sleep peacefully…" clarifies why the verse has talked about *maqīl* (resting-place, place of midday sleep). This means that

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, al-Fāryābī, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Summūyah's *Fawāʾid*.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Aʿlā, and via another chain of narration, on the authority of Suwayd b. Ghaflah.

the person will have an awakening afterwards [on the Day of Resurrection].

(6) Ibn ʿAbbās said:[1] ʿUqbah b. Abī Muʿayṭ used to sit a lot with the Prophet and was fond of his speech [that is, the Qur'an], but he was finally doomed to damnation. Whenever ʿUqbah returned from a journey, he would prepare a meal and invite all the people of Mecca. Once, when ʿUqbah had returned from a journey, he prepared a meal and invited the Messenger of God to it. The Prophet told him, "I would not eat from your food unless you testify that there is no god but Allah and that I am his messenger." ʿUqbah said, "Eat, O my nephew!" "I shall not do so," the Prophet replied, "until you say that." Thus, ʿUqbah testified and the Prophet ate from his food.

This news reached Ubayy b. Khalaf, who was ʿUqbah's friend. Ubayy went to him and said, "Have you embraced [his religion], O ʿUqbah?" ʿUqbah answered, "No, by God, I have not embraced [his religion]. The thing is that, the man came to me but refrained from eating unless I testified for him. I felt ashamed that he may leave my house without eating, so I testified for him, and he ate." "I will not take this excuse from you," Ubayy said, "unless you go to him and spit in his face." Thus, ʿUqbah did so. The Messenger of God told him, "I shall not see you outside Mecca, except when your head is raised by the sword." Indeed, ʿUqbah was captured as a slave in the Battle of Badr and killed. He was the only slave who was killed in that war.[2]

Author's comment: Concerning verse 25:27 (*Saying: O! Would that I had taken a way with the Messenger!*), there is more than one narration saying that "the way" (*al-sabīl*) is ʿAlī. These narrations refer to a hidden layer of the Qur'an. They could also be an application of the verse, but they are not the verse's interpretation.[3]

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1 This is concerning the verse: *O woe is me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend!* (25:28). (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū Nuʿaym, through the chain of al-Kalbī, on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ.

3 In other words, the verse has a general meaning which is not restricted to this one particular application. (Trans.)

Verses 32-40

These verses narrate and respond to another criticism of the polytheists against the Qur'an: Why has it not been revealed all at once?

وَ قالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ لا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً واحِدَةً كَذلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤادَكَ وَ رَتَّلْناهُ تَرْتِيلاً ﴿٣٢﴾

(25:32) ***And those who disbelieve say: Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once? Thus, that We may strengthen your heart by it and We have arranged it well in order.***

The speakers in this verse are the Arab polytheists who rejected the Qur'an's call. They are the same people who were mentioned when narrating a previous criticism: *And those who disbelieve say: This is nothing but a lie which he has forged* (25:4).

… Why has not the Qur'an been sent down* (nuzzila, from tanzīl) *to him all at once?…: We have already noted that the only difference between *inzāl* and *tanzīl* is that *inzāl* is a sudden descent, while *tanzīl* is a gradual descent.

Some exegetes have said: *Tanzīl*, in this verse, does not include its gradual aspect. Otherwise, the verse would be self-contradictory, in which case their statement would mean, "Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once gradually, in separation and differentiation?" This is self-contradictory because being sent "all at once" is inconsistent with being sent "gradually, in separation and differentiation." Instead, the meaning of the verse is: "Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once, not in pieces, just like how the Torah, the Gospel and the Psalms were revealed?"

However, it should be noted that the Torah, for instance, was revealed at once in written form on tablets, as attested by the Qur'an.[1] This was different from how the Qur'an was sent to the Prophet. The Prophet received the Qur'an from God through the Trustworthy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) [that is, the angel Gabriel], much like when a person hears a speech from a speaker. The giving and receiving of a book in written form [as in the case of the Torah] is an immediate act, which necessarily means that all of its parts come together at once. Speaking and hearing, on the other hand [as in the

1 See verses 7:145 and 7:150. (Trans.)

case of the Qur'an], do not contradict gradualness and separation between the parts of the speech. Rather, a speaker necessarily speaks one word after another, and the hearer also hears the speech gradually, in portions.

The request mentioned here—that the Qur'an should be sent down all at once—was made by people who had seen or heard how the Qurʾan was revealed to the Prophet (which was by receiving the exact text of the verses from the angel of revelation). Therefore, their demand was that even though the angel of revelation reads the Qur'an to the Prophet chapter by chapter and verse by verse, and even though he himself receives the verses in the same gradual manner, he should read it to the people all at once. In other words, they wanted the *entire* Qur'an to be recited by the angel, and heard by the Prophet, in a single occasion—even though that occasion would span some time because of the gradual nature of recitation and hearing. This interpretation is more compatible with the usage of the verbal pattern *tanzīl*, which indicates gradualness.

Contrary to a common view among the exegetes, what the polytheists say in this verse does not indicate that they wanted the Qur'an to be sent down to the Prophet in the form of a written book, as was the case of the Torah, the Gospel and the Psalms. Not to mention that the polytheists did not believe in the *actual revelation* of these scriptures [by God], let alone believing in their sudden *form* of revelation.

Either way, "*Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once?*" is a criticism made against the way in which the Qur'an was revealed. Given the polytheists' criticism, and the Qur'an's response to it, their argument can be elaborated as follows: If this were really a scripture which included a religion that God has prescribed for the people, then that religion should be complete with all of its components. Its roots and branches should be known, and it should include all of its obligatory and recommended rituals.

Moreover, a book containing a divine religion should be well organized, with its parts following one another in order. The Qur'an, however, is not like that. Instead, it is a collection of disunited speeches that Muḥammad has come up with, in different events and various times. As different events occurs, he makes some statements about them, calls them "verses," attributes them to God, and claims that they are "a recitation" (*qurʾān*) sent to him from God. But the fact is that whenever something happens, he sits down and thinks about it, then he makes up some speech and falsely attributes it to God. He is an apostate who is lost in wilderness. Therefore, this is not a divine book sent from God to the people through His messenger.

… *Thus* (kadhālika), *that We may strengthen* (li-nuthabbita, from tathbīt) *your heart* (fuʾādaka) *by it and We have arranged it well in order*

(rattalnāhu tartīlan): *Thubāt* (stability, establishment, fixedness) is the opposite of *zawāl* (disappearance, vanishing). *Ithbāt* and *tathbīt* have the same meaning (to stabilize, to establish, to fix), except that *ithbāt* is sudden while *tathbīt* is gradual. *Fuʾad* is synonymous with *qalb*, meaning "heart." As we have repeatedly said, "heart" in the Qur'an refers to the rational soul of human beings, which is characterized by understanding and cognition. *Tartīl* has been defined as *tarsīl*, which means "to bring things one after another."

The theme and flow of the verse shows that the word *kadhālika* (thus, as such) pertains to an omitted verb, which is then justified and explained by "*that We may strengthen*." The phrase "*and We have arranged it*" then adds to that. The implied meaning of the this part is: "We have sent it": the Qur'an; "thus": gradually and in differentiated series, as opposed to suddenly and all at once; "that We may strengthen your heart." Some exegetes have said that *kadhālika* is part of what "*those who disbelieve*" say, but this is a very implausible view.[1]

The complete explanation for why the Qur'an has been sent in pieces is: *That We may strengthen your heart by it*. This can be elaborated by contemplating the different methods of teaching and education. If any field of knowledge, especially a discipline that has a practical component, is taught to the students through a continuous lecture that covers the chapters one after another, the result is that the students will only have some overall mental understanding of the general topics of the discipline, with some details being kept in the repository of their minds to a certain extent, where they would have to recall them whenever there is a need for them. However, if these teachings are to be established and rooted in the soul, such that they would transform the person and would make the soul grow, they should be applied and put into practice in the real world, whenever a need for them arises.

For instance, there is a clear difference between conveying a medical issue to students of medicine only by teaching, and conveying it to them while they have to apply it to a patient whom they have to cure at hand. This is the application of speech to practice.[2]

The above should clarify that if one wants to learn and internalize any piece of knowledge, doing so when there is a practical need for it makes it

1 The meaning suggested by these exegetes would be: *And those who disbelieve say: Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once, like that* (kadhālika)*? It is because We may strengthen your heart by it…* It is implausible because it is not a direct meaning of the text that springs to mind at first. (Trans.)

2 In education, these two methods are sometimes classified, broadly, as "passive learning" "active learning," respectively. (Trans.)

more stabilized in the soul, stronger in the heart, and more deeply settled in the mind. This is especially true in teachings that pertain to our innate human nature and disposition (*fiṭrah*), because our innate nature is more prepared for receiving and accepting something when it feels a need for it.

The teachings of Islam—which are represented by the Qur'an—consist of certain practices and laws, at both the individual and the social levels, which bring about a happy human life. These laws are based on moral virtues, which are in turn related to fundamental religious beliefs. These beliefs, if analyzed, can be tracked down to the unity of God (*tawḥīd*). Likewise, *tawḥīd*, if elaborated, will unfold as the entire religious belief system, which then gives rise to ethics, and then in turn to practical laws.

Given the above, the best method of teaching and the most complete way of discipline for these noble teachings is to convey them gradually. The teachings should be imported upon the occurrence of particular events which call for some explanation of theoretical belief, moral virtues, and practical laws. Such teaching would be most effective if it is mixed with means of admonition and awareness, such as the stories of the past nations and the end of the transgressors, the haughty, and the extravagant.

This is how the Qur'an has been expressed, and how its verses have been revealed, as God says: *And it is a Qur'an which We have revealed in portions so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees, and We have revealed it, revealing in portions* (17:106). This is the meaning of: *Thus, that We may strengthen your heart by it* (25:32). And God knows best.

There remains a problem to be resolved with the above method: If the total learning components are separated from one another, and are taught to the learner in portions, then it may jeopardize the purpose and effect of teaching; by the time the next piece of information is taught, the material covered previously has lost its effect or has been forgotten, and the student may no longer have the determination and focus to retain the following information. If the components of knowledge are connected and continuous, on the other hand, they train the mind and prepare the brain to better understand and retain that knowledge—a goal that is not achieved otherwise.

God refers to this matter when He says: *And We have arranged it well in order* (25:33). This statement, in this context, means that even though Our revelation is gradual and differentiated, We have made its parts follow one another logically. We have sent them consecutively, such that the connections between them are not lost and the effect of each part does not fade away. The teachings are sent in chapters and verses that are revealed one after another, well arranged in a proper order. Therefore, the purpose and

effect of teaching is not defeated.

Besides the above, there is another aspect to consider: The Qur'an is a book of argument and clarification. It engages in debate with its followers and its opponents alike, and addresses their problems, doubts and objections. It clarifies their misunderstandings with regards to the teachings and wisdom found in the previous nations and religions, as well as the distortions and misinterpretations of the previous scriptures by the scholars. The Qur'an's elucidating argumentations can be seen clearly in the Qur'an's discussions about what the two Testaments say about the previous prophets, the knowledge of God, and the hereafter. It can also be seen in what the Qur'an has to say concerning the idolaters' beliefs about God, the angels, the jinn, and the human saints.

The disbelievers used to raise doubts against the Prophet and pose temptations to the believers on a regular basis. To clear these points and provide counter arguments, the revelation should be gradual, as the problems come up one after the other. This is what is meant by the next verse:

وَ لا يَأْتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلاَّ جِئْناكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَ أَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيراً ﴿٣٣﴾

(25:33) *And they shall not bring to you any description* (bi-mathal), *but We have brought to you (one) with truth and best in exposition* (tafsīran).

According to al-Rāghib, the verb *fasr* means to "convey an idea and disclose some meaning in an intelligible way." *Tafsīr* means the same, but with more emphasis and exaggeration; it is to convey a meaning very clearly. *Mathal* means *waṣf* (description, attribute). The meaning is: "Whenever the disbelievers come up with an incorrect and misinterpreted description—of you or of others [O Muḥammad]—We bring to you the truth about it or the best interpretation of it." What they bring is either totally false, in which case the truth will replace it; or it is some truth that has been distorted from its real position and taken out of its context, in which case the best exposition will clarify where it belongs and will make it right.

Given the above, these two verses—from "*Thus, that We may strengthen your heart*" (25:32) to "*and best in exposition*" (25:33)—respond to the disbelievers' objection: *Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once?* (25:32). The verses essentially provide two reasons for the gradual revelation of the Qur'an: (1) It is sent gradually in order to strengthen the Prophet's heart. This reason pertains to the Prophet. (2) It is sent gradually in order to provide the truth in response to the false accounts offered by the disbelievers. This reason pertains to the people. It refers to the Qur'an's clarification

of the false claims and descriptions that they made against the Prophet, as well as their distorted and misplaced accounts of the facts.

This answer is followed by the verse: *Those who shall be gathered upon their faces to hell, they are in a worse plight and straying farther away from the path* (25:34), which serves as a complement to the above points, as we shall discuss below.

It should also be clear that these three verses [25:32-34] are all in line with each other, and pursue the same purpose: answering the disbelievers' criticism against the Qur'an. The exegetes, however, have separated these verses from one another.

Here is how they have disintegrated the verses: (1) "*Thus, that We may strengthen your heart*" (25:32) responds to the disbelievers' claim, "*Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once?*" (25:32). (2) "*And We have arranged it well in order*" (25:32) simply states that the revelation—and/or the recitation—of the Qur'an to the Prophet has been arranged and ordered, without any specific connection to the previous part of the verse. (3) "*And they shall not bring to you any description*" (25:33) is an elaboration of "*Thus, that We may strengthen your heart*" (25:32), in the sense that it explains how the Prophet's heart is strengthened. Alternatively, verse 25:33 responds specifically to the disbelievers' description of the Prophet, by saying that God has clarified the truth about the Prophet's attributes, and has brought the best exposition of it. There are also other views about this verse. (4) The last verse—"*Those who shall be gathered…*" (25:34)—is completely irrelevant to the purpose of the two verses before it.

However, our explanations above (concerning the first two verses, 25:32-33) and below (concerning the third one, 25:34) should clarify that all of these views are unsatisfactory. Instead, the three verses have the same purpose, which is responding to the disbelievers' criticisms and disrespect of the Qur'an with regards to its gradual revelation.

The exegetes have further added that there are more benefits to a differentiated revelation of the Book than the answer given by God here: *Thus, that We may strengthen your heart* (25:32). Some of these benefits are:

(1) The scriptures before the Qur'an were sent at once because they were revealed to prophets who could read and write. That is also why they were sent in written form, all at once. The Qur'an, on the contrary, was revealed to an unschooled prophet who could not read or write. That is why it had to be sent gradually.

(2) The previous scriptures were not miracles that would prove them to be truly sent from God. As with the Qur'an, however, the evidence showing its authenticity as a revelation from God is its miraculous order. This is a

unique miracle throughout history, and a miracle which is found in all parts of the book, such that it challenges others to bring even one *sūrah* like the smallest chapters of it. There is also no doubt that a miracle has to be compatible with the external conditions, which necessitates a gradual sending of the Book, so that it remains updated as newer events occur.

(3) The Qur'an's content necessitates its gradual revelation, for the following reasons: (i) It contains abrogating (*nāsikh*) and abrogated (*mansūkh*) verses that cannot be sent all at once given the contradictions that it would create. (ii) It consists of questions that people asked the Prophet. (iii) It involves disapproval of certain events that had occurred. (iv) It narrates the account of certain events that had happened. (v) It contains news of future events during the life of the Prophet, such as the news about the conquest of Mecca, entering the Sacred Mosque, the victory of Romans over the Persians,[1] and so on.

Response: However, these are weak considerations that do not contradict a one-time revelation of the Book.

(1) As with the first view, even though the Prophet was unschooled and did not read or write, the Qur'an could still have been sent to him all at once, as he had many faithful Companions who could have written down the revelation for him. Moreover, God has assured the Prophet that He will protect him against forgetting: *We will make you recite so you shall not forget* (87:6). In addition, He has promised to preserve the revealed Reminder: *Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian* (15:9); *Falsehood shall not come to it from before it nor from behind it; a revelation from the Wise, the Praised One* (41:42). God's power to preserve the Book is equally applicable, whether the Qur'an were to be sent in portions or entirely at once.

(2) As with the second view, just the way a book that is sent gradually must have a certain order and meet certain conditions for it to be eloquent, a book sent in its complete form can also be eloquent if it meets certain conditions—even though its parts and chapters are sent all at once. In other words, the eloquence of speech is not limited to books that are produced in portions over a period of time.

(3) As with the points in the third view: (i) Abrogation does not mean the cancellation or rejection of a previous law. Instead, it refers to the expiration of its time, and the termination of its applicability. Therefore, abrogating and abrogated verses could be revealed together, by stating beforehand when the first law's applicability shall end—if there is wisdom and good

1 See verses 48:27 and 30:1-6. (Trans.)

reason to do so. (ii) It is possible to answer a question before it is posed, so that there would be no need to ask later on. Then, whenever the people ask anything, they would be referred to the given earlier. (iii) Similarly, it is possible to disapprove events before their occurrence. (iv) & (v) It is also possible to narrate the accounts of events before they happen, and give forecasts of future occurrences.

In short, none of the suggested points by the exegetes contradicts the Qur'an being sent all at once. It should also be noted that if we analyze these suggested benefits and wisdoms in sending the book in portions, some of them reduce to the strengthening of the heart. Therefore, they would not be additional views and considerations. Overall, we can conclude that the verse's answer is a complete view that is not missing any other consideration.

الَّذِينَ يُحْشَرُونَ عَلى وُجُوهِهِمْ إِلى جَهَنَّمَ أُوْلٰئِكَ شَرٌّ مَكاناً وَ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلاً ﴿٣٤﴾

(24:34) ***Those who shall be gathered upon their faces to hell, they are in a worse plight and straying farther away from the path.***

Given the context of the previous verses, and assuming that this verse follows the same thread, we can infer that those who made the above criticism against the Qur'an [25:32], made an incorrect conclusion about the Prophet based on their objections: they described him as being in an evil plight, and straying from that which is right. God did not explicitly mention this along with their statement about the Qur'an, in order to honor and preserve the position of prophethood from evil description. Instead, He only referred to it indirectly by revealing the above verse.

Therefore, "*Those who shall be gathered upon their faces to hell*" alludes to the disbelievers who criticized the Qur'an and described the Prophet wrongly. Such allusion is more expressive than explicit naming.[1] The verse is telling the Prophet: "The only people who are in an evil plight and stray away from the right path are those who mock the Qur'an and describe you inappropriately, not you." In other words, this statement reverses the two sides in order to counter their statement in the same format. This means that being "worse" and "farther away" are not meant in a comparative sense [but they are said only to match their statement]. It could also be that the adjectives are comparative, assuming a tone of rebuke or the like.[2]

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1 It is more expressive because it also expresses their evil end and punishment, which gives the statement a sense of threat. (Trans.)

2 In other words, the verse is not saying that "both sides—the Prophet and his mockers—are in an evil plight and straying from the path, but one is worse and

Those who shall be gathered upon their faces to hell…: This alludes to those who deny the hereafter, whose questions, excuses and objections are rather captious. God leaves them on their own to stray into error. He says: *And whomsoever Allah guides, he is the follower of the right way, and whomsoever He causes to err, you shall not find for him guardians besides Him; and We will gather them together on the day of resurrection on their faces, blind and dumb and deaf; their abode is hell; whenever it becomes allayed We will add to their burning. This is their retribution because they disbelieved in Our communications* (17:97-98).

In addition to being more expressive and eloquent, such indirect reference threatens the disbelievers that they are facing an evil plight and a painful punishment. The greatest straying is when one moves on his face, in a position where he cannot see what is in front of him. Therefore, the above expression also shows their utmost error and misguidance. Being resurrected and gathered in such a way, to hell, is a manifestation of their error and straying in this world. It is as if the verse is saying: "These are the people who are genuinely in error, because they shall be gathered on their faces, which is something that only applies to those who strayed in this world."

The exegetes disagree on the connection of this verse with the previous verses. Some have kept silent about it. *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says that the disbelievers described Prophet Muḥammad and the believers as: "They are the worst creatures of God." Thus, God answered them by saying: *They are in a worse plight and straying farther away from the path*. Some have connected this verse to an earlier verse: *The dwellers of the garden shall on that day be in a better abiding-place and a better resting-place* (25:24). However, by now you should know that the connection lies in what is implied through the theme and context of the verse.[1]

The exegetes also disagree about what is meant by "being gathered on their faces." Here are some of their interpretations:

It is meant in its apparent and literal sense; they will move from one place to another while being flat on their faces.

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farther away." Rather, it is saying that "those who are truly in an evil plight and stray from the path are the mockers, not the Prophet." The use of comparative in a context of rebuke and derision was mentioned as a last possibility under verse 25:24. It is similar to being sarcastic. It is as if the verse is saying, sarcastically, "So the Prophet is in an evil plight and straying from the path," then adding, "but the mockers are in a worse plight and more straying." (Trans.)

1 The verse implies that the disbelievers had also claimed that the Prophet is in an evil plight and straying from the right path. (Trans.)

It means being dragged.

It means moving from one place to another upside down, which is the opposite of walking regularly on the feet.

The problem with this view, specifically, is that if this were the intended meaning, the verse should have said "gathered upon their *heads*" not "upon their *faces*." In another verse, God describes their condition after their gathering as follows: *On the day when they shall be dragged upon their faces into the fire* (54:48).

This is a metaphorical expression for their humiliation, disgrace and failure.

The problem with this view is that metaphorical interpretation can only be granted if a direct interpretation of the text is impossible.

This is according to an Arabic expression, where they say, "So-and-so is going 'on his face.'" This expression is used when the speaker does not know where someone is going.

The problem with this view is that the verse is qualified by "to hell," which is therefore not compatible with the implied ignorance in the above expression.

This is a metonymy or figurative expression. What is meant is that they will be gathered while their hearts are attached to basic material things, and while their faces are directed to the ornaments of this world.

Some have objected to the last interpretation as follows: Upon resurrection, people will be so preoccupied with the reality of the hereafter that they will be unable to pay any attention to this world or be engaged with it. However, this expression might be a reference to the remaining traces and impacts of their material engagement and attachment.

With regards to the last two views, we should clarify that according to verses about the embodiment of deeds (*tajassum al-aʿmāl*), the disbelievers' punishment will be a representation of being attached to the world and being directed toward it throughout their life. Therefore, their only occupation and engagement on that day will be their material engagement and attachment.[1]

وَ لَقَدْ آتَيْنا مُوسَى الْكِتابَ وَ جَعَلْنا مَعَهُ أَخاهُ هارُونَ وَزِيراً ﴿٣٥﴾

(25:35) *And certainly We gave Moses the Book and We appointed*

1 In other words, their punishment will be the real and otherworldly form of their highest realization in this life, which is to be resurrected on their faces. Also see verse 67:22 for more insight on this. (Trans.)

with him his brother Aaron an aider.

This verse talks about Moses being appointed as a messenger, being given a Book, and having his brother as a partner in his mission. These points are meant to confirm the truth of Prophet Muḥammad's messengership and the revelation of the Qur'an to him, in response to the disbelievers' denial of him and his Book. The verse sets the stage for talking about the punishment and extermination of Pharaoh's clan. The meaning of the verse is clear.

فَقُلْنَا اذْهَبا إِلَى الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِنا فَدَمَّرْناهُمْ تَدْمِيراً ﴿٣٦﴾

(25:36) *Then We said: Go you both to the people who rejected Our signs* (bi-āyātinā)*; so We destroyed them with utter destruction* (dammarnāhum tadmīran).

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> *Tadmīr* is "to destroy in an unusual way," such as torturing someone. The verb *dammara* is used when someone attacks another person in an unpleasant way.

Āyāt (signs, communications), here, mean God's signs in the horizons and in the souls,[1] which point to God's unity. That is what the disbelievers rejected. Abū al-Suᶜūd says in his *Tafsīr*:

In this verse, *āyāt* refers to the nine miracles that Moses performed. Of course, when Moses and Aaron where told "*Go you both*," the people had not yet "*rejected Our signs*," because rejection of a sign necessarily occurs after being exposed to it. The right chronological order is that the two prophets were first ordered to go to the people, so they went, then they showed them the signs, and only then did the people reject the signs. Yet, the verse describes them as "*the people who rejected Our signs*" because here God is talking to Prophet Muḥammad, long after their time. This description is meant to explain and justify their destruction, which is mentioned next. That is: The two prophets went to them, showed them all of Our signs, yet they consistently rejected them, and thus We destroyed them.

This is an acceptable interpretation, if there is evidence to support that

1 This expression is taken from verse 41:53, and it refers to the signs of God's power both without and within; what one finds in the external universe, and what one finds in one's own soul. Alternatively, and based on verse 57:22, "signs in the souls" are events that affect the lives of the people, and "signs in the horizons" are other events that one observes to occur in the world. (Trans.)

āyāt, in this verse, specifically refers to the [nine] miracles of Moses.

This verse, and the previous one are related to the earlier discussion, which was about those who mocked the Prophet's Book and message. The verses threaten the audience by comparing the Prophet's mission to Moses, whom was given a Book by God, and sent with his brother to Pharaoh's tribe. Since they refused to accept his call, God destroyed them with utter destruction.

That is why the verses first say, "*We gave Moses the Book*" (25:35) before talking about their dispatch to the people and subsequent destruction of the deniers, even though the Torah was sent only *after* the drowning of the Pharaoh and his hosts. This order is used because the purpose of referring to this story is to mention the revelation of a Book to Moses, his appointment as a messenger, and the destruction of his people due to their rejection.[1]

Some exegetes have said that these two verses are related to an earlier verse: *and sufficient is your Lord as a Guide and a Helper* (25:31).[2] However, this is unlikely.

وَ قَوْمَ نُوحٍ لَمَّا كَذَّبُوا الرُّسُلَ أَغْرَقْناهُمْ وَ جَعَلْناهُمْ لِلنَّاسِ آيَةً وَ أَعْتَدْنا لِلظَّالِمِينَ عَذاباً أَلِيماً ﴿٣٧﴾

(25:37) ***And the people of Noah, when they rejected the messengers, We drowned them, and made them a sign for humankind, and We have prepared a painful punishment for the unjust.***

The word "people" is in the accusative case (*qawma*, which is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection), because it is apparently the object of an omitted verb that is implied by: *We drowned them*.[3]

… they rejected the messengers …: They rejected Noah in particular, but this is equivalent to rejecting all messengers, because they are united on the

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1 In other words, only those parts of Moses' story are mentioned here that serve the purpose of threatening the disbelievers. And among these parts, the revelation of scripture is mentioned first because that was the main subject of the previous verses. (Trans.)

2 That is, these verses comfort the Prophet and promise him assistance and victory from God. (Trans.)

3 Given the conjunction "and" at the beginning of the verse, the implied verb is apparently *dammarnā* (We destroyed), which was mentioned at the end of the last verse. The meaning would be: "And We destroyed the people of Noah as follows: When they rejected the messengers, We drowned them…" (Trans.)

message of truth. Moreover, these people were idolaters, meaning that they denied prophethood and messengership altogether.[1]

… and made them a sign for humankind…: They were made a sign for their descendants who remained after them. The rest is clear.

وَ عاداً وَ ثَمُودَ وَ أَصْحابَ الرَّسِّ وَ قُرُوناً بَيْنَ ذلِكَ كَثِيراً ﴿٣٨﴾

(25:38) *And ʿĀd and Thamūd and the dwellers of the Rass and many generations between them.*

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *rass* means "unfenced well." Some exegetes have said that "the dwellers of the Rass" were people who came after the people of Thamūd and settled next to a well. God sent a messenger to them, but they rejected him, and thus God exterminated them. It is also said that al-Rass is the name of a river that was located where these people lived. This view is supported by some Shia narrations.

And ʿĀd…: The conjunction "and" connects to: *the people of Noah* (25:37). The implied meaning is: And We also destroyed *ʿĀd, Thamūd*, and the people of the Rass…

… and many generations* (qurūnan) *between them: *Qarn* (singular of *qurūn*) means "people who live in the same era." Sometimes *qarn* is used to refer to the very time and era [of contemporary generations]. The pronoun "them" in "*between them*" refers to the abovementioned people, starting from the people of Noah and ending with either the dwellers of the Rass or Pharaoh's people. The meaning of the verse is: We destroyed ʿĀd, who were the people of Hūd, Thamūd, who were the people of Ṣāliḥ, the dwellers of the Rass, and many generations between the abovementioned groups, from the time of Noah onwards.

وَ كُلاًّ ضَرَبْنا لَهُ الْأَمْثالَ وَ كُلاًّ تَبَّرْنا تَتْبِيراً ﴿٣٩﴾

(25:39) *And to everyone* (kullan) *We gave examples and everyone did We destroy with utter destruction* (tabbarnā tatbīran).

The word *kullan* is in the accusative case (as its inflectional mood is *manṣūb*), showing that it is the object of a verb that is implied by: *We gave examples*.[2] *Ḍarb al-amthāl* (giving examples, drawing parables) effectively

1 In other words, their rejection of the whole concept and possibility of human prophets and messengers is equivalent to their rejection of all messengers. (Trans.)

2 The meaning is: "We gave examples for every one of the above tribes," where

means "admonishing, advising, and warning." *Tatbīr* means *taftīt* (to crumble, to fragment, to grind). The meaning of the verse is:[1] And We admonished all of these nations by examples, but We had to obliterate them all because of their denial and defiance.

وَ لَقَدْ أَتَوْا عَلَى الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي أُمْطِرَتْ مَطَرَ السَّوْءِ أَ فَلَمْ يَكُونُوا يَرَوْنَها بَلْ كانُوا لا يَرْجُونَ نُشُوراً ﴿٤٠﴾

(25:40) ***And certainly they have (often) passed by the town on which was rained an evil rain; did they not then see it? Nay! They did not hope to be raised again.***

"The town" refers to the people of Lot, as God sent down rain of stones of clay upon them. Their story was already discussed in the previous chapters.[2]

… did they not then see it?…: This is a rebuke in the form of a rhetorical question, because their town was in the way of the people going from Hijaz to the Levant.

… Nay! They did not hope to be raised again: There are two possible meanings for the word "hope" in this verse: (1) They were not *afraid* of any form of resurrection. (2) They totally dismissed the *likelihood* of a resurrection. This sentence is similar to what God said above [about the Arab polytheists]: *Nay, they reject the Hour* (25:11). This signifies the main reason that causes them to: (1) reject God's Book and His Messenger; (2) not take heed of these healing admonitions; and (3) not learn from what they should learn from [that is, the stories of the previous nations being destroyed for their denial]. The root cause of all this is that they do not believe in the hereafter. That is why they turn a deaf ear to the religious call, and no words of wisdom or admonition sits in their hearts.

Examining Narrations

(1) Here is a summary of a long hadith where Imam ʿAlī narrates the story of "the dwellers of the Rass": They used to worship a spruce

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the object—"everyone"—is mentioned before the verb—"gave examples"—for emphasis. (Trans.)

1 What follows as the meaning of the verse is missing in the original Arabic. (Trans.)

2 See verses 7:80-84, 11:77-83 and 15:57-77. (Trans.)

tree (*ṣanawbarah*) called Shāh-Dirakht [lit. "King Tree," in Persian]. It had been planted by Japheth (Yāfith), son of Noah, after the flood, and was located next to a spring called Rawshan-Āb [lit. "Luminous Water"]. They had twelve prosperous towns on the bank of a river called al-Rass. These towns were named: Ābān, Ādhar, Day, Bahman, Isfandār, Farwardīn, Urdībihisht, Khurdād, Murdād, Tīr, Mihr, and Shahrīwar. The Persians derived the names of their months from these twelve.

The people of the Rass took blossoms from that spruce tree and planted one in each of their towns, then channeled a stream from the spring next to the tree to pass by their local spruce. They prohibited themselves and their animals from drinking from that water, and enforced a death penalty for doing so, on the account that it is the source of life of their gods; no one shall dare reduce the life of the gods.

Each town had a feast day every month, when they would go out of the town to their spruce tree, with offerings and sacrifices that they would burn in a fire. When the smoke of their offerings rose and filled the sky, they would prostrate before the tree, weep and plead to it. At that point, a devil used to talk to them from the tree. This was their custom in each town. They had a main town where their king, named Isfandār, used to live. On the day of the main town's feast, the people of all towns would gather and celebrate for twelve days. They would offer the maximum amount of sacrifice and worship that they could to the tree. Satan (Iblīs) would talk to them and give them hopes and promises, more than the other devils who used to speak through the trees of the other towns in their feasts.

When their disbelief in God and their worship of the tree persisted for too long, God sent a messenger to them who was from the Children of Israel, from the descendants of Judah. The messenger urged the people of the Rass to worship God and abandon polytheism. He propagated God's religion for a period of time, but the people refused to believe in him. Thus, he imprecated the tree, and the tree dried out. The people were disturbed to see this. Some of them said, "This man has put our gods under a spell." Others said, "Our gods are angry with us because of him. They saw this man calling us to dissociate from them, but we let him to be free,

without taking any action in support of our gods."
Thus they agreed to kill the messenger. They dug a deep well, threw him in it, and closed the well tight. They let him stay there, while hearing his wailing, until he died. Consequently, God sent a severe punishment to their towns and destroyed them all.[1]

(2) Imam ʿAlī said: Where are the dwellers of the cities of al-Rass—those who killed the prophets, extinguished the customs of the messengers and revived the customs of the oppressors?[2]

(3) Once, a group of women went to see Imam al-Ṣādiq. One of them asked him about *saḥq* (female homosexuality). He said, "Its penalty is the same as the penalty for *zinā* (adultery, fornication)." The woman said, "But God has not mentioned it in the Qur'an." "Of course He has," the Imam responded. She asked, "Where?" He answered, "They were [the women of] al-Rass."[3]

(4) Once, two women asked [Imam] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, "Does the Book of God prohibit intercourse between two women?" He said, "Yes. This was practiced by women at the time of Tubbaʿ, and also by the dwellers of the Rass—although the word *rass* is used for any river or well." He then added, "For these women, there shall be veils of fire, armors of fire, belts of fire, crowns of fire, and boots of fire; and worse than all these: coarse, itchy, ragged and stinking clothes of fire." [Imam] Jaʿfar then said, "Teach this to your women."[4]

Author's comment: Al-Qummī has narrated a tradition to the same effect on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Jamīl, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

(5) Concerning *tabbarnā tatbīran* (utter destruction) in the verse "*and everyone did We destroy with utter destruction* (tabbarnā tatbīran)" (25:39) Imam al-Ṣādiq said, "It means: We broke them with utter breaking (*kassarnā taksīran*)." He then added, "It is a word that is used by the Nabṭīs [a people in Iraq]."[5]

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1 *ʿUyūn-i Akhbār al-Riḍā*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū al-Ṣalt al-Harawī, from Imam al-Riḍā.

2 *Nahj al-balāghah*.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥamzah, Hishām and Ḥafṣ.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bayhaqī, Ibn ʿAsākir and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā—concerning the reprehensibility of means of distraction.

5 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth.

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(6) Imam al-Bāqir said: "*The town on which was rained an evil rain*" (25:40) was Sodom, where the people of Lot lived. God sent upon them a rain of *sijjīl*, which means clay.

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Verses 41-62

These verses describe some of the attributes of the disbelievers who were mentioned above—those who mocked God's Book and His Message, and who denied God's unity and the hereafter. The qualities mentioned in these verses are relevant to the disbelievers' objections and demands in the previous verses. Some of these qualities are: deriding the Messenger, following worldly desires, serving gods that neither benefit them nor harm them, and arrogant refusal to prostrate before God.

وَ إِذا رَأَوْكَ إِنْ يَتَّخِذُونَكَ إِلاَّ هُزُواً أَهذَا الَّذِى بَعَثَ اللَّهُ رَسُولاً ﴿٤١﴾

(25:41) ***And when they see you, they do not take you for aught but a mockery* (huzuwan)*: Is this he whom Allah has raised to be a messenger?***

The plural pronouns and conjugations here, refer to "those who disbelieve" who were mentioned above (in verses 25:4 and 25:32). *Huzʾ* is a verbal noun that is synonymous with *istihzāʾ* (mockery, derision). In this verse, however, it has an objective meaning (that is, "one who is mocked").[1] The meaning of the verse is: When those who disbelieve see you, they only take you as someone to be mocked.

… Is this he whom Allah has raised to be a messenger?: This is a description of the disbelievers' mockery. In other words, they used to ridicule the Prophet by saying this.

إِنْ كادَ لَيُضِلُّنا عَنْ آلِهَتِنا لَوْ لا أَنْ صَبَرْنا عَلَيْها وَ سَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ حِينَ يَرَوْنَ الْعَذابَ مَنْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلاً ﴿٤٢﴾

(25:42) ***He had well-nigh* (in kāda)** ***led us astray from* (li-yuḍillanā ʿan, from iḍlāl)** ***our gods had we not adhered to them patiently! And they will know, when they see the punishment, who is straying farther off from the path.***

1 In Arabic, a *maṣdar* (verbal noun, infinitive, gerund) is sometimes used instead of a subject or object, usually for emphasis. In this verse, this usage means that all of their interaction and dealing with you is that of derision and mockery. (Trans.)

In this verse, the particle *in* is an elided form of *inna* (truly, indeed).[1] Using the verb *iḍlāl* (misguiding, leading astray) with the preposition *ʿan* (from, of) effectively means "turning away" (*ṣarf*). "Had we not" introduced a conditional sentence, but its complement (called the apodosis) is omitted, because it is understood from the previous part of the verse.[2] The meaning of the first part of the verse is: He was almost going to turn us away from our gods; had we not persisted with our gods—that is, had we not persisted in worshiping them—he would have surely turned us away from them.

… And they will know, when they see the punishment, who is straying farther off from the path: This is a word of caution, threat and warning to the disbelievers from God's. It says that they are heedless of the punishment which they shall see in the near future. Then they will know for certain that they were astray and in error.

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلاً ﴿٤٣﴾

(25:43) *Have you seen him who takes his god to be his low desire* (hawāhu)*? Will you then be a protector over him?*

Hawā is "an inclination of the soul that is not checked or controlled by reason." In this verse, "taking one's low desire as a god" refers to obeying and following one's material desires instead of God. God frequently criticizes the following of desires in His Book, and counts *ṭāʿah* (obedience, subservience) of something as being equivalent to its *ʿibādah* (worship, service). He says: *Did I not make a covenant with you, O children of Adam, that you should not serve the Satan? Surely he is your open enemy. And that you should serve Me* (36:60-61).

… Will you then be a protector over him?: This is a rhetorical question that implies a negation. God is telling the Prophet: "You are not a protector over a disbeliever; you are not in charge of him or his affairs so that you may lead him to righteousness. You are unable to do so as long as God has led him astray, and has cut off his means of guidance." This is equivalent in meaning to these verses: *Surely you cannot guide whom you love* (28:56), and: *And you cannot make those hear who are in the graves* (35:22). The current

1 That is, the phrase *in kāda*, is in fact *innahu kāda*, where the stress in the particle *inna* has been omitted, whereby the pronoun *-hu* would also drop. (Trans.)

2 It could also be that the verse simply involves a change of order, where the complement (apodosis) is mentioned before the condition (called the protasis). This is a more apparent interpretation, and requires no omission in the verse. Either way, the meaning would be the same. (Trans.)

verse [25:43] is a concise version of what is expressed more elaborately elsewhere in the Qur'an: *Have you then considered him who takes his low desire for his god, and Allah has made him err in having knowledge and has set a seal upon his ear and his heart and put a covering upon his eye. Who can then guide him after Allah?* (45:23).

Given the above explanation, the phrase "*who takes* (ittakhadha) *his god to be his low desire*" follows a natural order. "Takes," in the verse, is a ditransitive verb [that is, a transitive verb that takes two objects]. The first object is "his god," and the second object is "his low desire." This classification of the words is compatible with the context of the verse, which is about the polytheism of the idolaters, their deviation from serving God to serving the idols, and their aversion from obeying the Truth. They turned away from obeying God to obeying their desires, which made polytheism seem fair to their eyes. They correctly realized that there is some god which they should obey, but they incorrectly took this god to be their low desires. Thus, they obeyed their desires instead of obeying the Truth [that is, God]. Therefore, the verse does not mean that they denied obedience and devotion altogether, but it means that they assumed their desires as their object of obedience. They mistakenly replaced the Truth, which is the real object of obedience, with their desire. The reader should reflect on this.[1]

The above explanation should clarify the implausibility of what several exegetes have said—that "his low desire" is the first object of the verb "takes," and "his god" is its second object. According to some exegetes, the second object is mentioned first because that is the main focus of the verse, which conveys a sense of surprise, as implied by the rhetorical question: *Have you seen him who takes…?* While according to others, the second object is mentioned first to convey exclusivity.[2] The exegetes have plunged into a lengthy debate about this order, which we shall skip. Our exposition above should be sufficient, by the will of God.

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1 In other words, the disbelievers' problem is not that they reject to obey anyone or anything. Rather, their problem is how they *apply* this in practice. They know and accept that there is someone to obey (called a "god") but they take this god to be their low desire. If we interpret the two objects of the verb "take" in the opposite order—that is, "Have you seen him who takes his low desire to be his god"—then it would mean that they totally dispense with the idea of having a god to obey, without going about to find an instance or application for it. (Trans.)

2 The case of surprise would mean: "Is it not strange that some people take their low desire to be their god?" It is surprising because desire is the last thing to be taken as a god. The case of exclusivity would mean: "Have you seen people those who have no god to be obeyed except their low desire?" (Trans.)

أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ إِنْ هُمْ إِلاَّ كَالْأَنْعامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلاً ﴿٤٤﴾

(25:44) *Or do you think* (am taḥsabu, from ḥusbān) *that most of them do hear or understand? They are nothing but as cattle; nay, they are straying farther off from the path.*

The Arabic particle *am* (lit. "or") at the beginning of this verse does not signify an alternative conjunction that links to the previous verse.[1] *Ḥusbān* (to think), in this verse, means *ẓann* (suppose, imagine, reckon). The plural pronouns here refer to the subject of the previous verse, in the sense that they applied to a collection of individuals. The contrast between *samᶜ* (hearing) and *ᶜaql* (understanding, reasoning) is important, because an individual has two means to making right decisions: (1) If people can apply their reasoning independently, then they can understand the truth on their own and thus follow it. (2) If they cannot apply their reasoning independently, then they can refer to, and follow, someone who can reason and discern the truth, assuming that they would not withhold their sincere advice from those who refer to them. Therefore, the path to growth and righteousness is either hearing or understanding. In this sense the verse is similar in meaning to the verse: *And they shall say: Had we but listened or pondered, we should not have been among the inmates of the burning fire* (67:10).

The meaning of the verse is: Rather, do you suppose that most of them have the capacity to give an ear to the truth and follow it, or have the ability to understand the truth and follow it? If so, then you may hope for their guidance, and thus exert your utmost effort to call them to it.

… They are nothing but as cattle…: The first part of the verse is equivalent to saying: "Most of the disbelievers neither hear, nor understand." Now, this statement explains and justifies that by saying that they are just like animals, in terms of lacking proper understanding and hearing. They only hear some sounds, but cannot discern the meaning.

… nay, they are straying farther off from the path: That is, they are farther off compared to the cattle. There are two reasons for this: (1) Animals do not rush toward and push for their harm, but these people prefer what harms them over what benefits them. (2) Although animals are astray from the right path, they are not created with faculties and means that would lead them to guidance. These people, however, have the faculties and means of

1 In other words, it serves as a transition to a new statement in this verse. (Trans.)

guidance, yet they are straying.

Some exegetes have concluded, from this verse, that cattle have no knowledge of their Lord. However, the point of the verse is not to deny the animals' knowledge of their Lord altogether. Neither does it deny the disbelievers' knowledge of God altogether. Instead, the verse is primarily concerned with the faculty of reason, which is specifically found in human beings according to their nature, and which guides them to the truth. The disbelievers are veiled from following the direction of their reason due to following their desires. It is in this sense that the verse compares them to the cattle, who do not have that kind of cognition at all.

Some exegetes have answered the above view by saying that the verse is only about what is mentioned and apparent. However, there is no proof for this.[1]

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلى رَبِّكَ كَيْفَ مَدَّ الظِّلَّ وَ لَوْ شاءَ لَجَعَلَهُ ساكِناً ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا الشَّمْسَ عَلَيْهِ دَلِيلاً ﴿٤٥﴾ ثُمَّ قَبَضْناهُ إِلَيْنا قَبْضاً يَسِيراً ﴿٤٦﴾

(25:45-46) ***Have you not considered (the work of) your Lord, how He extends the shade? And if He had pleased, He would certainly have made it stationary; then We have made the sun an indication of it. Then We take it to Ourselves, taking gently.***

These two verses, and what follows after—up to nine verses in total—provide illustrations for the previous verses. The last two verses—or rather, the last four—can be summarized as follows: God has sent His Messenger on a mission to guide the people to the right path, and to rescue them from error. Some people—whom God wills—find their way to guidance through his message. As with others—who take their god to be their low desires—are like beings that neither hear, nor understand; and thus, no one can guide them other than God.

The message of these verses [25:45ff] is that, what was mentioned above about God sending guidance for humankind should not seem strange or unlikely, because God has many other astonishing acts and creations. They are all clear signs which show that His actions follow a consistent path. Some examples are:

1 In other words, some have said that the verse only pertains to the apparent sense and impression that animals have no understanding, but it should not be taken as literally or factually. The author's answer is that there is no argument to prove this view. (Trans.)

(1) He has extended the shadow, with the sun indicating it and replacing it [25:45-46].

(2) He has made the night a covering, has made sleep a rest, and has made the day a rising [25:47].

(3) He has made the winds as bearers of good news; and by means of rain He revives the dead lands and quenches the thirst of cattle and people [25:48-49].

Then, there are two more analogies for the believers and disbelievers, who differ in terms of guidance and error—yet they are all the servants of God, who live on the same land:

(1) They are like two waters, one being sweet and clean, the other being salty and bitter. God has placed them next to each other, but has drawn a barrier, and a forbidden barrier, between them [25:53].

(2) They are like the water from which God has created humankind, whom He has divided into those of blood relationships and those of marriage relationships. Through these relationships He has diversified humankind, "*and your Lord is Powerful*" (25:54).

The above explanation is an overview of what we can infer from reflecting on the content of these verses and their specific structure, which show how these verses connect to previous verses. Some exegetes have said that these verses are meant to explain some arguments for *tawḥīd* (monotheism, God's unity), because the previous verses referred to the ignorance and error of those who turn away from it. However, the theme and context of the verses do not support this view, as we shall elaborate and clarify below.

As we said above, this verse [25:45] is an analogy for the disbelievers' immersion in ignorance and error, which God can lift as He wills by means of sending a messenger with a religious call to the truth. Given this analogy, "the extending of the shade" refers to after midday, when shadows grow gradually, extending from the west to the east as the sun approaches the horizon to set. They reach their maximum length at sunset, which is the beginning of the night. These shadows are ever on the move during this time, but had God wanted, He would have made them stationary.

Have you not considered (the work of) your Lord…?: This expression involves a shift of address. In the previous verses, God was the speaker, using first person plural form; but here, He is absent in third person singular. The reason for this transition is that this verse, and its subsequent verses, are meant to say that guidance is exclusively up to God, and that the Prophet has no say in it. God has not willed to guide the disbelievers. Error has extended over those who stray like the extending of shade, while the prophets' messages and calls of truth oppose error and remove it like

the sun that eliminates the shade. This is a general analogy for a universal custom that governs the extension of God's mercy [at all times and in all nations]. Clearly, this address specifically applies to the Prophet, in the sense that it denies him from having the power to guide them [that is why "you" and "your" in the verse are in second person singular form]. As for the disbelievers, they are not worthy of being addressed here because they take their god to be their low desire, do not hear, and do not understand [25:44].

… then We have made the sun an indication of it: This means that the sun is an indication for the existence of the shade. We realize the existence of shadows and their gradual expansions and contractions based on the presence, absence and extension of sunlight. Had it not been for the sun, we would be unaware of the existence of shades. A general cause that makes people perceive certain things is a change in the people's condition, such as missing something after having them, or vice versa. When people miss what they used to have, they become mindful of its existence; and when they find what they did not have, they become aware of its non-existence. If something is fixed and stable, without any change of condition, then there is nothing to remind us to conceive and recognize it.

… then We have made the sun an indication of it: Here, again, the verse returns to the previous form of address, where the first person plural clearly indicates a sense of grandeur and magnificence.[1]

In the subsequent verses, some parts are like the expression, "*Have you not considered (the work of) your Lord?*" (25:45) in terms of tone and address, such as: *And He it is Who made the night…* (25:47), *And He it is Who sends the winds…* (25:48), *And He it is Who has merged the two seas* (25:53), and: *And He it is Who has created man from the water…* (25:54). There are also some parts that are similar to the expression, "*then We have made the sun*" (25:45), such as: *and We send down from above pure water* (25:48), *And certainly We have repeated this to them* (25:50), and: *And if We had willed, We would certainly have raised…* (25:51).[2]

ثُمَّ قَبَضْناهُ إِلَيْنا قَبْضاً يَسِيراً ﴿٤٦﴾

(25:46) ***Then We take it to Ourselves, taking gently.***

That is: Then, We make the shade disappear as the sun shines and rises slowly, higher and higher, to the point where the shade is completely gone.

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1 This is called the majestic plural, or the royal "we." (Trans.)

2 In other words, the verses alternate between first person singular and first person plural. (Trans.)

God describes the disappearance and elimination of the shade as "taking it to Ourselves gently." This expression indicates God's absolute power, such that no action is difficult for Him to do. It also shows that when things are lost—after existing for some period of time—it does not mean that they are totally annihilated into non-existence. Rather, it they return to God.

Our interpretation above—that "the extending of the shade" refers to the period of time after midday, when shadows grow—is a unique interpretation and unprecedented by other exegetes. What the other exegetes have said, on the other hand, is implausible and incompatible with the theme and context of the verses. Here is a list of some of their suggested interpretations:

The verse refers to the extending of shadows between dawn (*fajr*) and sunrise.

It refers to the extending of shadows at night, between sunset and sunrise.

It refers to the appearance of a shadow when the sun shines on a solid object like a mountain, a building or a tree.

It refers to the day when God created the heaven and made it dome-shaped, then stretched the earth from beneath it, whereby the heaven's shade fell on the earth.

The last one is the weakest of these interpretations.

وَ هُوَ الَّذِی جَعَلَ لَکُمُ اللَّیْلَ لِباساً وَ النَّوْمَ سُباتاً وَ جَعَلَ النَّهارَ نُشُوراً ﴿۴۷﴾

(25:47) ***And He it is Who made the night a covering* (libāsan)** ***for you, and the sleep a rest, and He made the day to rise up again.***

The night is a *libās* (covering, clothes), in the sense that its darkness covers a person like a germent that one wears.

… and the sleep a rest (subātan), and He made the day to rise up again (nushūran): Based on al-Rāghib's definition, *subāt* means *qaṭ*ᶜ (termination, cessation); and *nushūr* means *intishār* (spreading, dispersion, dissemination). The meaning is: He has made sleep a termination and cease of activity, and has made the day a time of spreading out [from one's home] to seek sustenance.

God covers the people by the night, disconnects them from activity and movement by its darkness [and by their sleep], and then brings about the day and spreads its light to make them rise again, work, and endeavor. God does these things just like He extends the shade, makes the sun indicator of it, and then takes the shade to Himself gently.

وَ هُوَ الَّذِی أَرْسَلَ الرِّیاحَ بُشْراً بَیْنَ یَدَیْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَ أَنْزَلْنا مِنَ السَّماءِ ماءً

طَهُوراً ﴿٤٨﴾

(25:48) ***And He it is Who sends the winds as good news*** **(bushran)** ***before His mercy; and We send down from above pure water.***

Bushr is an elided form of *bushur*, which is the plural of *bushūr*, meaning *mubashshir* (bearer of good news and glad tidings). In this verse, "His mercy" refers to rain. The meaning is: God is the One Who sends the winds as bearers of good news before His mercy.

… and We send down from above **(al-samāʾ)** ***pure water*** **(ṭahūran)*:*** *Samāʾ* here, means "up, above," which would be the atmosphere above the earth. It is said that *ṭahūr* is an adjective in an exaggerated form, meaning that rain water has the utmost degree of purity. It is pure itself, and also purifies other things. It removes dirt, takes away filth, and gets rid of defilement.

لِنُحْيِيَ بِهِ بَلْدَةً مَيْتاً وَ نُسْقِيَهُ مِمَّا خَلَقْنا أَنْعاماً وَ أَناسِيَّ كَثِيراً ﴿٤٩﴾

(25:49) ***That We may give life thereby to a dead land*** **(baldatan maytan)** ***and give it for drink, out of what We have created, to cattle and many people*** **(anāsiyya kathīran).**

The meaning of *baldah* is known (town, city, country), but in this verse it denotes a more general meaning of *makān* (place, location, land). The same general meaning is seen in the verse: *And as for the good land* (al-balad al-ṭayyib)*, its vegetation springs forth (abundantly) by the permission of its Lord* (7:58). This is why the adjective of *baldah* is mentioned in the masculine form: *mayt*.[1] A "dead land" is one which has no plants growing in it. "Giving it life" means "making it grow plants." *Anāsī* is the plural of *insān* (human).

The verse talks about the land being overcome by death and needing water for itself, its animals and its people. Then, God sends down pure water from the sky, with which He revives the dead land and quenches the thirst of the cattle and the people. This again, is similar to the analogy of extending of the shade, indicating it by the sun and eradicating the shade by the sun, as mentioned above.

وَ لَقَدْ صَرَّفْناهُ بَيْنَهُمْ لِيَذَّكَّرُوا فَأَبى أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ إِلاَّ كُفُوراً ﴿٥٠﴾

1 In other words, even though *baldah* is feminine, it has taken a masculine adjective (*mayt*) on the account of its meaning (*makān*) which is masculine. (Trans.)

(25:50) ***And certainly We have turned it about among them that they may be mindful, but the greater number of people do not consent to aught except denying.***

Given the apparent connection of this verse to the previous verse, the pronoun "it" in "*turned it about*" refers to "water" [in verse 25:48]. "Turning it about them" means directing rain water away from one community to another from time to time, on a regular basis. Thus, it does not rain all the time in one place only, lest its people may perish; nor does it not rain at all in one place, lest its people may perish. Instead, it takes turns among them, such that every place gets its suitable and befitting share. Some have said that "turning it about" means "directing rain water away from one place to another."

… that they may be mindful, but the greater number of people do not consent to aught except denying: This explains and justifies why water is turned about among them. The verse means: I swear that We have certainly turned water about, by distributing it among the people so that they may take heed and give thanks, but most of them refuse to do so and refrain from anything other than being ungrateful toward Our blessings.[1]

وَ لَوْ شِئْنا لَبَعَثْنا فِي كُلِّ قَرْيَةٍ نَذِيراً ﴿٥١﴾

(25:51) ***And if We had willed, We would certainly have raised a warner in every town.***

It means: Had We wanted to raise a warner in every town to warn the people, and a messenger to convey Our message to them, We would have certainly done so. But instead, We have raised you [O Muḥammad] as a warner and messenger to all towns, because of your grand status and position in Our eye.

This is how the exegetes have interpreted the verse, which can be

1 The expression, "and certainly We have turned about" appears in three other places in the Qur'an (17:41, 17:89, 18:54), all of which are about providing a variety of examples and clarifications for the people in the Qur'an, and all of which end with the disbelief and aversion of the people. One can especially see a close connection between the current verse [25:50] and the verse: *And certainly We have explained for men in this Quran every kind of similitude, but most men do not consent to aught but denying* (17:89). Given this Qur'anic evidence, it could be that the pronoun "it" in the current verse refers to God's communications and warnings in the Qur'an. Note that the author makes a similar interpretation about the pronoun "it" in verses 25:52 and 25:57 below. (Trans.)

confirmed by the next verse, and is also compatible with the explanation that we suggested about the connection of the verses.[1] Another possible meaning of the verse is: We are capable of raising a messenger in every town, but We only chose you because of some wisdom and consideration in doing so.

فَلا تُطِعِ الْكافِرِينَ وَ جاهِدْهُمْ بِهِ جِهاداً كَبِيراً ﴿٥٢﴾

(25:52) ***So do not follow the disbelievers, and strive against them*** **(jāhidhum, from mujāhadah)** ***a mighty striving*** **(jihādan)** ***with it.***

The letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse shows that this verse is mentioned as a conclusion of the previous verse. The pronoun "it" in "with it" refers to the Qur'an, as verified by the theme and context of the verses. *Mujāhadah* and *jihād* mean "exerting the utmost effort in one's ability against the enemy." Doing so "with the Qur'an," means reciting the Qur'an to the disbelievers, explaining its realities to them, and leaving them no excuse.

The gist of the verse is that the Prophet should remove the veils of ignorance and heedlessness that have covered the hearts of the people, by clarifying the truth for them and leaving them no excuse. In doing so, the role of his divine mission can be compared to the examples given in the previous verses: (1) His message is like the sun, which indicates the extension of shades, and also eradicates them, by God's command. (2) His message is also like the day, in contrast to the night and its rest. (3) Finally, his message is like the rain, which is sent to a dead land and its thirsty cattle and people. The verse means: We have sent you as a warner for all towns, so do not follow the disbelievers, because doing so would violate this universal practise of guidance. Instead, exert your maximum effort and ability to convey the message and complete your argument by means of the Qur'an, which comprises the true call. Strive with it a mighty striving.

وَ هُوَ الَّذِي مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ هذا عَذْبٌ فُراتٌ وَ هذا مِلْحٌ أُجاجٌ وَ جَعَلَ بَيْنَهُما بَرْزَخاً وَ حِجْراً مَحْجُوراً ﴿٥٣﴾

(25:53) ***And He it is Who has merged*** **(maraja)** ***the two seas, one sweet and potable*** **(ʿadhbun furāt)***, the other salty and bitter* **(milḥun**

1 In this case the connection would be that the Prophet's message and warning would be like the sun which takes away the extended shade of ignorance and error. (Trans.)

ujāj)*; and between the two He has made a barrier* (barzakhan) *and forbidden barrier* (ḥijran maḥjūran).

Maraja means "to mix, to blend." *Marīj* [as an adjective] means "mixed, confused." Water is called *ʿadhb* if it tastes good, and it is called *furāt* if it is very sweet and potable. On the other hand, water is called *milḥ* if it has undergone a change of taste, and it is called *ujāj* if it is very salty. *Barzakh* means "a boundary that separates between two things." *Ḥijran maḥjūran* means that it is forbidden and prohibited for one water to mix with the other.

… and between the two He has made…: This expression clarifies the meaning of "the merging of the two seas" in the verse. It does not mean that the two seas are mixed into one another, but means that they are placed next to each other.

The conjunction "and" at the beginning of the verse, joins this verse to: *And He it is Who sends the winds…* (25:48).[1] This verse is an analogy for the religious message, in the sense that the message results in a distinction between believers and disbelievers. Although the two groups live in the same land and mingle with one another, they are nevertheless distinct from each other, as we mentioned at the beginning of this set of nine verses [under verses 25:45-46].

وَ هُوَ الَّذِی خَلَقَ مِنَ الْماءِ بَشَراً فَجَعَلَهُ نَسَباً وَ صِهْراً وَ کانَ رَبُّکَ قَدِیراً ﴿۵۴﴾

(25:54) *And He it is Who has created man* (basharan) *from the water, then He has made for him blood relationship* (nasaban) *and marriage relationship* (ṣihran)*, and your Lord is Powerful.*

Ṣihr means "in-laws, the relatives of one's wife," as narrated from al-Khalīl. Therefore, the word *nasab* refers to related individuals from the man's side, while *ṣihr* refers to related individuals from the woman's side; thus has been said.[2] This interpretation is confirmed by the contrast between the two terms in the verse.

Some have said that in this verse, both *nasab* and *ṣihr* are meant in the genitive case, with an implied prefix *dhū* which has been omitted.[3] The

1 In other words, the verse resumes the discussion about the signs of God. (Trans.)

2 Apparently, what is meant is that *nasab* includes individuals that connect to one through one's father, brother, or son; while *ṣihr* includes individuals that connect to one through one's mother, sister, or daughter. (Trans.)

3 The prefix *dhū* indicates possession. It literally means, "possessor of…"

implied meaning of the verse would then be: "He has made humankind possessors of blood relationship and marriage relationship." The pronoun "him" in the verse refers to *bashar* (human, mortal). It is also said that in this verse, *al-māʾ* (the water) means *nuṭfah* (sperm, seed, seminal fluid). It is also possible that *al-māʾ* refers to water in its absolute sense [as indicated by the particle *al-*], from which God created all living beings, as He says: *And We have made of water everything living* (21:30).

The meaning of the verse is: "It is He Who has created from sperm—which is a type of water—the human being, and has divided it into two: possessors of *nasab* and possessors of *ṣihr*, meaning man and woman, respectively." This is another example that conveys the same idea as the last verse: God preserves plurality in the midst of unity, and dispersal in the midst of union. Likewise, even though all humans are united in humanity and mingle with each other in the society, God maintains their differences in terms of belief and disbelief. He does so by sending messengers who lift the veil of error and misguidance, which would have covered the people were it not for the call to truth [by God's messengers and religions].

… and your Lord is Powerful: Here God refers to Himself as "Lord" and ascribes it to the Prophet in the second person. The point of this ascription is the same as what we saw in the verse: *Have you not considered (the work of) your Lord* (25:45).[1]

وَ يَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ما لا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَ لا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَ كانَ الْكافِرُ عَلى رَبِّهِ ظَهِيراً ﴿٥٥﴾

(25:55) *And they serve besides Allah that which neither profits them nor causes them harm; and the disbeliever is a partisan* (ẓahīran) *against his Lord.*

The conjunction "and" joins this verse to: *And when they see you, they do not take you for aught but a mockery* (25:41). It is said that *ẓahīr* is synonymous with *muẓāhir*, derived from *muẓāhirah*, which means *muʿāwanah* (to assist, to help, to aid).

The meaning of the verse is: These polytheists and disbelievers serve

(Trans.)

1 The point, as discussed above in detail, is that the address is specifically made to the Prophet because it is a matter of guidance, in which he has no say because only God is the All-Powerful. As for the disbelievers, they are not worthy of being addressed because they follow their base desire. (Trans.)

others besides God, who do not benefit the people when they serve them, nor harm their worshipers if they stop serving them. The disbelievers are assistants of Satan against their Lord.

Apparently, "those who are served besides Allah" refer to the idols. Saying that "they cause the people no harm" does not contradict the harmfulness of idolatry. What the verse means is that these idols themselves have no harm, because they have no power to be able to do anything, but this does not necessitate that serving them is also harmless. Rather, serving the idols necessarily leads one to eternal punishment and wretchedness.

وَ ما أَرْسَلْناكَ إِلاَّ مُبَشِّراً وَ نَذِيراً ﴿٥٦﴾

(25:56) ***And We have not sent you but as a giver of good news and as a warner.***

That is: We have sent you only on a mission of giving good news and warnings. You are not in charge of anything beyond that. Hence, you are not held accountable if the people oppose their Lord and assist His enemy against Him, because they shall never cause God to be helpless. Rather, they only plot against themselves.

This is the meaning of the verse according to the context. Given this interpretation, what is said in this verse—"*And We have not sent you but as a giver of good news and as a warner*"—is similar to what was said previously: *Will you then be a protector over him?* (25:43). The same idea is reiterated in two parts of the chapter.

Some exegetes have suggested: Here, God comforts His Prophet by saying that We have only sent you as a bearer of good news for the believers, and a warner for the disbelievers, so do not grieve over their lack of belief.

However, our interpretation [based on the context of the verse and its connection to the previous verses] should clarify the implausibility of this suggested view.

قُلْ ما أَسْئَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِلاَّ مَنْ شاءَ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ إِلى رَبِّهِ سَبِيلاً ﴿٥٧﴾

(25:57) ***Say: I do not ask you any reward for it except for him who wishes to take a way to his Lord.***

The pronoun "it" in "for it" refers to the Qur'an, in the sense that its recitation conveys God's message to the people and fulfills the Prophet's mission. God says: *Surely this is a reminder, so whoever pleases takes to his Lord a way* (73:19 and 76:29), and: *Say: I do not ask you for any reward for it; nor am I of those who affect: It is nothing but a reminder to the nations* (38:86-87).

… except for him who wishes to take a way to his Lord: This is a disconnected exception that implies a connected exception,[1] because the effective meaning of it is: "except that one should take a way to his Lord; whoever wants to do so." It is along the lines of His words: *The day on which property will not avail, nor sons, except for one who comes to Allah with a sound heart* (26:88-89), which means, "except coming to God with a sound heart; by anyone who may do so." In both verses [25:57 and 26:89] what is meant is the *action*, although the verse mentions the *subject* who does that action instead of the action itself.

What the current verse implies is that if one takes a way toward God by answering the call of truth, this act counts as a reward for the Prophet. This shows the Prophet's utmost selflessness and indifference to any financial or honorific reward from the people. It shows that the Prophet does not want anything from them except answering the call of God and following the truth. He does not require wealth, status, or any other conceivable payment in return for his service. Thus, the people shall rest assured about him, and should have no doubt about his sincerity.

The verse also qualifies their "taking a way" by their "wish" [as it says: *him who wishes to take a way*]. This shows their total freedom as far as the Prophet is concerned. There is no compulsion because the Prophet's only duty from his Lord is to make warnings and give glad tidings to the people. He is not a guardian over them. The final matter is up to God to decide, and He will judge among them as He wills.

Say: I do not ask you any reward for it except for him who wishes to take…: After confirming that the Prophet's mission is only to bear good news and warnings, God orders him to tell the people that he has no ulterior goal in calling to them, except that they accept his call and take a way toward their Lord. He has no other incentive whatsoever beyond that, such as gaining some sort of reward. Moreover, the people have total freedom of choice; they are not forced to accept the Prophet's message. Thus, it is them and the call of truth: if they wish, they can believe; otherwise, they can disbelieve.

This is what concerns the Prophet: simply conveying the message, without expecting anything in return, without imposing God's message on the people by force, and without avenging them by any punishment. What

1 The exception in both verses is disconnected (*munqaṭiʿ*), because what is excepted is a "person" while the subject of the previous part is an action or attribute, not "people." However, they both reduce to connected (*muttaṣil*) exceptions because what is meant by the "excepted person" is the action or attribute of such a person. (Trans.)

happens beyond that is left up to God; the Prophet should refer to and rely on Him about it, as indicated in the next verse: *And rely on the Ever-living Who dies not* (25:58).

Here are some alternative views suggested by the exegetes:

The exception in the verse is disconnected, and the implied meaning is: "I do not ask of you any payment for my mission and delivering God's message to you. However, if anyone wishes to pay me a compensation [for my religious mission], then he can instead pay charity in the way of God. This is what is meant by: *take a way to his Lord*." This is the view of the majority of exegetes.

Comment: This is a weak interpretation that is neither supported by the verse's content, nor by its context.

The exception in the verse is a connected exception, but the verse involves an omitted annexed noun (*muḍāf*). The implied meaning of the verse is: "Except *the action of* he who wishes to take a way to his Lord through belief and obedience alone, for I only call to these two things."

Comment: This interpretation implies that the Prophet is asking for their positive response as his reward, which comforts their souls and assures them that he has no selfish interests. Therefore, this interpretation reduces to the same meaning that we mentioned above. The only problem with it is that it also assumes an omitted annexed noun, while omissions are not a primary choice in interpretation [of any text].

The exception in the verse is a connected exception, but the verse involves an omitted annexed noun. The implied meaning is: "I do not ask of you any reward for following me, except *the reward of* him who wishes…" In other words, I am happy with the reward that God will give me for the people's belief, because "the guide to good is like its doer."[1]

Comment: The problem with this interpretation is that if it were the intended meaning, then the verse should have said, "except for him who takes a way to his Lord," without qualifying it by the person's wish. This is because reward is given for *action*, not for merely *wishing* an action.[2]

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1 This is a famous Prophetic hadith which encourages people to help and guide others to do good deeds. (Trans.)

2 The suggested interpretation is saying that the Prophet is only interested in the reward that God will give him for being a means for others to believe. The other's objection is that such reward would materialize when the people *actually believe*, not when they *wish to believe*. Therefore, it is incompatible with the text of the verse. (Trans.)

وَ تَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْحَيِّ الَّذِی لا یَمُوتُ وَ سَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِهِ وَ کَفی بِهِ بِذُنُوبِ عِبادِهِ خَبِیراً ﴿۵۸﴾

(25:58) ***And rely on the Ever-living Who dies not, and glorify Him with praise; and Sufficient is He as being aware of the sins of His servants.***

In the previous verses, God clarified it to His Prophet that he is not responsible for anything other than conveying the message of truth to the people. God also ordered the Prophet to tell them two things: (1) his sole objective his mission is that they would accept Islam; and (2) they are free to choose whether to believe or not. In this verse, God complements the above theme by ordering the Prophet to take Him as his guardian, with regards to the affairs of the people. God is a Protector and a Guardian over everything, including the people; and He is well aware of the sins of His servants.

And rely on the Ever-living Who dies not…: That is: Take God as your guardian concerning their affair; He shall judge amongst them as He wills, and treat them as He sees fit. Indeed, He is a Guardian over them and over all things.

Instead of naming Allah, the verse describes Him as "*the Ever-living Who dies not*." This is meant to explain and justify the verse's command to rely on God. The implied argument is: Given that He is the Ever-living Who never dies, nothing can escape from Him and He does not miss anything. It thus follows that He can be relied upon.

… and glorify Him with praise…: That is: Declare God's purity, clearness and exaltedness from weakness, ignorance, and any imperfection that does not befit His Sacred Precinct. Then, couple that with praise for Him by declaring His qualities of excellence.

This means that if God gives the people relief and bounties in order to draw them to doom step by step (*istidrāj*), then it is not due to His weakness or His ignorance of their sins. Similarly, if He hastens to punish them for their sins, then it is because His wisdom has necessitated so, and because their worth and capacity has called for it. Therefore, glory and praise belong to Him.

… and Sufficient is He as being aware of the sins of His servants: The purpose of this statement is to prove God's unity in His actions and attributes. He is the sole authority Who manages the affairs of His servants; He alone is aware of their sins; and He alone judges among them. He does not need anyone else to help Him in His knowledge or judgment.

There are three descriptions in this verse and the next which complement one another: (1) "*The Ever-living Who dies not*," which refers to God's life. (2) "*Sufficient is He…*," which refers to God's knowledge and awareness [of everything]. (3) "*Who created the heavens and the earth*" (25:59), which indicates God's unity in His kingdom and direction of affairs. Adding them up, these statements affirm God's life, knowledge and kingdom, which suffice to prove His qualification to be relied upon and taken a *wakīl* (representative, agent, guardian, delegate).

الَّذِی خَلَقَ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضَ وَ ما بَیْنَهُما فِی سِتَّةِ أَیَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوی عَلَی الْعَرْشِ الرَّحْمنُ فَسْئَلْ بِهِ خَبِیراً ﴿۵۹﴾

(25:59) *Who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six periods, and He is firmly established on the Throne of authority; the Beneficent* (al-Raḥmān), *so ask from Him (Who is) Aware* (fa-isʾal bihi khabīran).

Given the context and connection of the verses, the pronoun "Who" at the beginning of the verse refers to "*the Ever-living Who dies not*" in the last verse. This verse completes the explanation for the previous command: *And rely on the Ever-living Who dies not* (25:58). A representative (*wakīl*), on whom one relies, must have a few qualities:

(1) Life [which was mentioned at the beginning of verse 25:58].

(2) Knowledge, which was mentioned in: *and Sufficient is He as being aware of the sins of His servants* (25:58).

(3) Authority to rule and manage. The current verse (25:59) refers to this condition by talking about God's creation of the heavens and the earth, and His establishment on the Throne.

We have already discussed the first portion of this verse [*Who created the heavens and the earth … and He is firmly established on the Throne of authority*] in several parts of the previous chapters.[1] As with the subsequent part—"*the Beneficent, so ask from Him (Who is) Aware*"—the theme and flow of the verse suggest that "the Beneficent" must be a predicate for an omitted subject, implying: "God is the Beneficent." Then, a conclusion is drawn from this verse by saying: "So ask (*fa-isʾal*)," where the letter *fāʾ* indicates *tafrīʿ* (consequence, conclusion). The letter *bāʾ* (lit. "from, of, about") in *bihi* (from Him) serves to connect the transitive verb "ask" to its object. It also implies that this question is important and worthy of attention and

1 See the author's discussion under verses 7:54, 10:3 and 20:5. (Trans.)

care to the command to ask God.[1] The word *khabīran* (Aware) serves as *ḥal* (circumstantial qualifier): it indicates the condition of the pronoun in *bihi* (from Him).[2]

The meaning of the verse is: God is the Beneficent Who is firmly established on the Throne of authority; He maintains the creation and directs the affairs by His mercy and grace; everything has begun from Him, and to Him everything returns. Therefore, ask Him about the fact of the matter and He shall inform you of it, for He is Aware.[3]

Note that the word *khabīr* literally means "one who is informed." Therefore, the statement "*ask from Him (Who is)* khabīr" implies that whatever God informs you about is the exact truth of the matter. It is similar to when someone says, "Ask me and I shall answer you in detail." Putting it more simply, it is like the saying: "I'm your man!"[4]

The exegetes have suggested many other interpretations for the last part of the verse: *the Beneficent, so ask from Him (Who is) Aware*. Some of their views are:

"The Beneficent" (*al-Raḥmānu*) is mentioned as a praise of God, standing on its own in the middle of the verse, and disconnected from the rest of the verse, as indicated by its *marfūᶜ* inflection [indicated by the vowel *u* at its end].[5]

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1 The verb "ask" is itself transitive, but the addition of *bihi* shows emphasis. Therefore, the last part of the verse means: "Ask God Who is Aware," where the Prophet is told to refer to God for information. (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: "Ask God *Who* is Aware," or "Ask God *while* He is Aware," which implies justification. That is: "Ask God *because* He is Aware." (Trans.)

3 Based on the author's interpretation, the verse tells the Prophet to ask God, without specifying what to ask about. That is why the author has interpreted this in an absolute sense: "Ask Him about the fact of the matter." In other words: "Refer to God for any question that you may have." Most English translations have interpreted this otherwise: "Ask *about* God *from* someone who is aware and knowledgeable," where the Prophet is told to refer to someone who is aware—such as Jewish scholars—in order to verify God's abovementioned qualities. What strengthens the author's interpretation is that the Qur'an always uses the attribute *khabīr* (aware) in reference to God, which adds up to 45 times. The following Qur'anic evidence is also insightful and much relevant to the current discussion: *and none can inform you like the One Who is Aware* (35:14).

4 The Arabic expression is: *ᶜalā al-khabīr saqaṭta*, which literally means, "You have fallen on the person who knows." In other words, "You have come across the right person for it." (Trans.)

5 That is: "He is the Beneficent," with a tone of praise. Being "disconnected" means

"The Beneficent" is the subject, and its predicate is "so ask Him."[1]

"The Beneficent" is the subject, and its predicate is "Who," at the beginning of the verse.[2]

"The Beneficent" is a substitute (*badal*) for the pronoun "He" in "He is firmly established" (*istawā*).[3]

"Ask Him" is the predicate of "the Beneficent," and the letter *fāʾ* (lit. "so, then") in *fa-isʾal* is *al-fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* (revealing or clarifying *fāʾ*).[4] This is the same as number (2) above.

"So ask Him" is an independent phrase that is mentioned as a conclusion of its previous part. The letter *fāʾ* indicates consequence and conclusion (*tafrīʿ*).[5] The letter *bāʾ* in *bihi* means "who is…"[6]

The letter *bāʾ* in *bihi* means *ʿan* (about), and the pronoun in *bihi* either refers to God or to the previous part of the verse about His creation of the universe and His establishment on the Throne.[7]

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that the word is neither a subject nor a predicate for any other part of the verse, or for any omitted part. (Trans.)

1 The meaning would be: "The Beneficent is the One Whom you should ask." (Trans.)

2 That is: "He Who created the heavens… is the Beneficent." (Trans.)

3 The meaning would be: "He, the Beneficent, is firmly established on the Throne." *Badal* works much like a pronoun, in the sense that it replaces another word. In some cases, like this one, it functions similar to an apposition in English. (Trans.)

4 In other words, the letter *fāʾ* does not show a conclusion that is made from the previous part of the verse, but it is meant to clearly outline and emphasize the command "ask Him." (Trans.)

5 In other words, "the Beneficent" is neither a subject nor a predicate for the command at the end of the verse: *So ask Him*… This can correspond to any of the first four suggested views above for "the Beneficent" (*al-Raḥmān*). Note that in the English translation of the verse used here, the role of "the Beneficent" is kept ambiguous in conformity to the original Arabic. Thus it is open to many interpretations. (Trans.)

6 The meaning would be: "Ask Him Who is Aware," referring to God; or "Ask him who is aware," referring to Jewish scholars. (Trans.)

7 If the pronoun refers to God, the meaning would be, "Ask about God from one who is aware." If the pronoun refers to God's creation and establishment the meaning would be, "Ask about God's creation of the universe and His establishment on the Throne from one who is aware." It could also be that "who is aware" refers to God, meaning that the Prophet is ordered to ask God about Himself or about His creation and establishment. (Trans.)

Khabīran describes the state of the pronoun in "Ask Him." The meaning would be: "Ask God *while* He is Aware."

Khabīran is the [second] object of the verb "ask" [that is, one who is asked] and the letter *bā*ʾ in *bihi* means *ʿan* (about). The meaning would be: "Ask someone who is aware *about* the Beneficent—or about the story of God's creation and establishment."

The exegetes have also suggested many individuals for who is being referred to by *khabīr* (aware):

God.

Gabriel.

Muḥammad.[1]

Those who had read the previous scriptures, who were familiar with God's attributes and actions, and who knew about how the universe was created and brought into existence.

Anyone who has knowledge of these realities.

Most or all of these diverse views do not comply with what is understood from the theme and context of these noble verses. Thus, there is no reason to talk about them or discuss them in detail.

وَ إِذا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اسْجُدُوا لِلرَّحْمنِ قالُوا وَ مَا الرَّحْمنُ أَ نَسْجُدُ لِما تَأْمُرُنا وَ زادَهُمْ نُفُوراً ﴿٦٠﴾

(25:60) ***And when it is said to them: Make obeisance to the Beneficent, they say: And what is the Beneficent? Shall we make obeisance to what you bid us? And it adds to their aversion.***

This verse marks another one of the people's mistreatments of God's Messenger and his call to truth. It refers to their arrogant refusal and aversion to prostrate before God when they are called to do so. This verse has a specific connection to the previous verse, because it mentions the title *al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), which was described in the last verse. Thus, the article *al-* ("the" in "the Beneficent," *al-Raḥmān*) could be a definite article.[2]

And when it is said to them: Make obeisance to the Beneficent…: The pronoun "them" refers to the disbelievers. The speaker who says this phrase

1 In this case, the verse would not be addressed to the Prophet, even though it is in the second person singular. Instead, it orders any listener or reader to refer to the Prophet in order to learn about God and His creation. (Trans.)

2 In other words, the previous verse (25:59) defines *al-Raḥmān*, and this verse (25:60) refers to the same *al-Raḥmān* Who was just described. (Trans.)

to them is the Prophet, as inferred from their response: *Shall we make obeisance to what you bid us?* The verse does not explicitly identify the Prophet as their audience in order to show that their arrogant behavior is really opposition to God.

… they say: And what (mā) is the Beneficent?…: By using the word "what" (the particle *mā*) instead of "who" (the particle *man*), the disbelievers ask the Prophet about the reality and "whatness" of God, pretending to be totally ignorant about Him. This language itself stems from their pride and arrogance against God. Otherwise, they would have simply asked, "And *who* is the Beneficent?" This question from the disbelievers is similar to what Pharaoh asked Moses when Moses called him to the Lord of all realms: *And what is the Lord of all realms?* (26:23). It is also similar to Abraham's question: *What are these images to whose worship you cleave?* (21:52). In questions like these, the one asking the question implies that he does not know *anything* about the subject that he is asking about, except its name. In this sense, it is similar to what Prophet Hūd said to his people: *What! Do you dispute with me about names which you and your fathers have given?* (7:71).

… Shall we make obeisance to what* (li-mā) *you bid us?…: Here again, the disbelievers refer to God by the word "what" (*mā*), which shows their disrespect and adamant arrogance. They also use the word *amr* (bidding, command, order) in reference to what the Prophet told them—"*Make obeisance*"—which implies a sense of mocking and derision.[1]

… And it adds to their aversion: The conjunction "and" joins this sentence to "they say." The pronoun "it" in "it adds" refers to the Prophet's *command* to "*make obeisance to the Beneficent*." The meaning is: When they are told to prostrate [before God], they show arrogance and it only adds to their aversion.

It is narrated that once the disbelievers saw the Prophet and his Companions prostrating, whereby they turned away from them in a disparaging manner. Based on this account, some exegetes have said that the pronoun "it" in "it adds" refers to the Prophet's *act* of *sujūd* (obeisance, prostration). However, this is not a plausible view, because the occurrence of an event cannot define the meaning of a text as long as there is no reference to that event in the text, which is the case with the current verse. The verses make no reference to this story whatsoever.

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1 The use of a strong term—like *amr* (command)—shows their sarcastic tone. It effectively means, "Who are *you* to bid us what to do and what not to do?" It is like when one ridicules another person by saying, "Yes, Your Majesty! You may command as you wish!" (Trans.)

تَبارَكَ الَّذِى جَعَلَ فِى السَّماءِ بُرُوجاً وَ جَعَلَ فِيها سِراجاً وَ قَمَراً مُنِيراً ﴿٦١﴾

(25:61) ***Blessed is He Who made the strongholds*** **(burūjan)** ***in the heavens and made therein a lamp and a shining moon.***

In this verse, "lamp" (*sirāj*) refers to the sun, as seen in the verse: *And He made the sun a lamp* (71:16). Apparently, the word *burūj* (constellations, mansions, strongholds) refers to either of two things: (1) the solar and lunar mansions in the sky; or (2) the stars that are in the heavens. We discussed this under the verse: *And certainly We have made constellations in the heaven and We have made it fair seeming to the beholders. And We guard it against every accursed devil* (15:16-17). These constellations are specifically called *burūj* (lit. "tower, castle") in order to signify their aspect of being guards and missiles [against the devils], as mentioned in verses 15:16-17.

According to the exegetes, this verse proves that there is a Single Director for the heavens and the earth, because of the astonishingly uniform and consistent system that governs both the heavens and the earth. Hence, one should direct one's service to the Sole Director of the universe, and should turn one's face toward Him alone.

However, having pondered over the connection between this verse, the previous verses, and the overall theme of these verses, we find that this interpretation is not plausible. The last verse talked about the disbelievers' defiance against the Beneficent when they are ordered to prostrate before Him, and their mocking of His Messenger. These themes, in the last verse, are not directed to an argument for the unity of God's Lordship. Instead, it is more relevant to say that the current verse [25:61] is about God's dominance and needlessness. It says that the disbelievers cannot render God helpless by these actions that they do, and can never step out of His kingdom and authority.

Blessed is He Who made the strongholds in the heavens…: Given the above contemplation, this verse serves to indicate God's dominance and needlessness, and that the disbelievers cannot defeat God by being arrogant against Him and deriding His Messenger. They are blocked from getting close to the Holy Precinct of God and rising to the heaven of His proximity; that is, they have no access to divine teachings. This [spiritual] heaven, nevertheless, shines brightly for God's servants who have a special connection with Him, because God has illuminated the heaven by the light of His guidance, which is the light of the message [brought by Muḥammad].

God praises Himself here by saying that "He is Blessed" (*tabāraka*). He praises Himself for having done two things: (1) He has created guarded

constellations which fend off the devils with flames in the physical universe. (2) He has made a luminous sun and a shining moon in order to illuminate the physical world. These physical examples are used as an illustration of His real illumination of the human world by the light of guidance through messengership, which gives insight and understanding to His true servants. That is why the chapter continues to describe these special servants of God [in verses 25:63ff]. The guarded constellations, with their repelling flames, also represent how God prevents the agents of the devils from rising toward Him.

The above explanation is what we can infer from the context and thread of the verse, which is consistent with the overall theme of this set of verses, as we mentioned under the verse: *Have you not considered (the work of) your Lord, how He extends the shade?* (25:45).[1] What we said here is not a hidden or esoteric interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of the verses. In other words, it does not dismiss or deviate from the apparent meaning of the text.

وَ هُوَ الَّذِی جَعَلَ اللَّیْلَ وَ النَّهارَ خِلْفَةً لِمَنْ أَرادَ أَنْ یَذَّکَّرَ أَوْ أَرادَ شُکُوراً ﴿۶۲﴾

(25:62) *And He it is Who made the night and the day to follow each other* (khilfah) *for him who desires to remember or desires to be thankful.*

Khilfah means "the replacement of something by something else, and vice versa."[2] The verbal pattern *fiʿlah* signifies *nawʿ* (type, kind) and serves as an adjective. Therefore, *khilfah* should be interpreted as an adjective for night and day. It means that each of them replaces the other in a way. Then, this notion of replacement is qualified by, "*for him who desires to remember or desires to be thankful*," which indicates that each of those creations can take the place of the other for the purpose of invoking God and giving thanks to Him.

Given the contrast between "remembrance" and "thankfulness" in this verse, we can interpret them as follows: (1) "Remembrance" refers to being mindful of one's inherent knowledge about God. The innate human nature and disposition (*fiṭrah*) points to the unity of one's Lord, and the names and attributes that He deserves. Hence, "remembrance" boils down to belief in

1 The overall theme of the verses is about God's guidance through sending a messenger, and the contrast between believers and disbelievers. (Trans.)

2 Apparently, "vice versa" here, means that *khilfah* is "a mutual replacement between two things" as is the case between night and day. Another possibility is that *khilfah* means "either replacing another thing or being replaced by another thing." This possibility is also true about day and night. (Trans.)

God. (2) "Thankfulness," on the other hand, refers to speech or action that shows one's appreciation of God for the blessings that He has bestowed upon the person. Therefore, "thankfulness" boils down to God's ʿ*ibādah* (service, worship), and consequently righteous deeds.

The verse implies God's domination and/or His grace over His servants, by creating the night and the day in such a way that each of them replaces the other. Thus, if one fails to be a believer in one period of time, he can make up for it in the other, and if one misses an act of worship or any righteous deed in either of these two times, he can do it in the other.

The above interpretation is what we can infer from the verse, which is also relevant to the previous verse, where it says: *and made therein a lamp and a shining moon* (25:61). It means that even though God has blocked the arrogant disbelievers from rising to His Precinct of Proximity, He has not prevented His servants from seeking proximity to Him and benefiting from His light. He has illuminated the day by a bright sun, has illuminated the night by a shining moon, and has made the two follow one another. Thus, if one misses to remember Him or thank Him in one of them, he can do so in the other.

Some exegetes have interpreted "remembrance" as the obligatory prayers, and "thankfulness" as the recommended prayers. This is one possible application of the verse, but the verse cannot be restricted to this application.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 25:43 (*Have you seen him who takes his god to be his low desire?*), the Messenger of God said: Among the gods that are served besides Allah under the shade of the sky, none is greater to Allah [in evil and reprehensibility] than one's desires which is complied[1] with.[2]

(2) Concerning verse 25:45 (*Have you not considered (the work of) your Lord, how He extends the shade?*) Imam al-Bāqir said: The shade refers to the period between dawn and sunrise.[3]

(3) Concerning verse 25:54 (*And He it is Who has created man from the water…*), Ibn Sīrīn said: This verse was revealed about the Prophet and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. ʿAlī was both the cousin and the son-in-law

1 Note that this narration implicitly sets *ittibāʿ* (following, complying with, obedience) equal to ʿ*ibādah* (service, worship). (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭabarānī, on the authority of Abū Umāmah.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

of the Prophet, as he was married to Fāṭimah. He was both, a *nasab* (blood-related), and a *ṣiḥr* (marriage-related).[1]

(4) Concerning "*and the disbeliever is a partisan against his Lord*" (25:55), Ibn ʿAbbās said: It refers to Abū al-Ḥakam b. Hishām, whom the Messenger of God named Abū Jahl.[2]

Author's comment: The last two narrations are more probably cases of *jary wa taṭbīq* (stating a particular application in conformity to the universal sense of the verse).

(5) Concerning "*Blessed is He Who made the strongholds* (burūjan) *in the heavens*" (25:61) Imam al-Bāqir said: *Burūj* (constellations, strongholds) are the stars. The constellations of spring and summer are: 1. Aries the Ram (Ḥamal); 2. Taurus the Bull (Thawr); 3. Gemini the Twins (Jawzā); 4. Cancer the Crab (Saraṭān); 5. Leo the Lion (Asad); 6. Virgo the Virgin (Sunbulah). The constellations of fall and winter are: 7. Libra the Balance (Mīzān); 8. Scorpio the Scorpion (ʿaqrab); 9. Sagittarius the Archer (Qaws); 10. Capricorn the Goat (Jady); 11. Aquarius the Water Bearer (Dalw); 12. Pices the Fishes (Ḥūt). They add up to twelve constellations.[3]

(6) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: If you miss anything at night [of the obligatory or supererogatory acts of worship], you can compensate it in the [next] day. God says: *And He it is Who made the night and the day to follow each other for him who desires to remember or desires to be thankful* (25:62). It means that if one misses something in the night, he can make up for it in the day; and if one misses something in the day, he can make up for it in the night.[4]

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Mardawayh.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

4 *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*.

Verses 63-77

These verses describe the virtues of the believers, in contrast to the above-mentioned vices of the disbelievers. The verses can be summarized by saying that the believers call their Lord, and accept His Messenger and the Book that He has sent to him, in contrast to the denial of the disbelievers, who turn away from God in favor of their own desires. That is why these verses, and the chapter, end by saying: *Say: My Lord would not care for you were it not for your calling; for you have indeed rejected (the truth), so that shall be binding* (25:77).

وَ عِبادُ الرَّحْمنِ الَّذِينَ يَمْشُونَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ هَوْناً وَ إِذا خاطَبَهُمُ الْجاهِلُونَ قالُوا سَلاماً﴿٦٣﴾

(25:63) ***And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk on the earth in humbleness, and when the fools address them, they say: Peace.***

In the previous verses, God talked about the disbelievers' arrogance against Him and their derision of His noble name of *al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent). In this verse, He turns to an opposite description, which is of the believers: He names them "servants," and attributes them to Himself. In doing so, God refers to Himself by the name *al-Raḥmān*, which is the very name that the disbelievers rejected and turned away from [in verse 25:60]. This verse mentions two qualities of the believers:

(1) ***… they who walk on the earth in humbleness (hawnan)…:*** According to al-Rāghib, *hawn* means *tadhallul* (humility, humbleness, subservience). It is most plausible to say that "walking on the earth," in this verse, is a figurative expression for their entire lifestyle. It describes how they deal and associate with people in general. Within themselves, they are subservient toward their Lord; and with the people, they are humble. This is because they see themselves as servants of God [or because they are genuine servants of God]; thus they have no pride against God, nor do they seek undue ascendancy over others. Meanwhile, they are never subservient before the enemies of God in order to win their favor and benefit from their illusory domination. Such humility is far from the true servants of the Beneficent. It could also be that *hawn* means lenience and moderation (*rifq*, *līn*). Then, it would mean that the believers do not walk pompously and pretentiously.

(2) ***… and when the fools (al-jāhilūn) address them, they say: Peace:*** Here, instead of using a noun, the verse refers to the other side by their quality of *jahl* (imprudence, foolishness, ignorance). Therefore, the sentence is about speeches which stem from the imprudence and ignorance of the speaker, and which the believers find to be heavy and unpleasant. The response of the believers, however, is "peace," which means a speech that is free from vanity and sin. This interpretation of "peace" can be deduced from what God says [about the inhabitants of Paradise]: *They shall not hear therein vain or sinful discourse, except the word peace, peace* (56:25-26). In short, the believers do not respond to foolishness by foolishness.

As some exegetes have pointed out, this verse describes the believers during the day, when they go out among the people. As with their behavior during the night, it is described in the next verse.

وَ الَّذِينَ يَبِيتُونَ لِرَبِّهِمْ سُجَّداً وَ قِياماً ﴿٦٤﴾

(25:64) *And they who pass the night* (yabītūna, from baytūtah) *before their Lord* (li-Rabbihim), *prostrating themselves* (sujjadan) *and standing* (qiyāman).

Baytūtah means "to pass the night, whether sleeping or not." *Sujjad* and *qiyām* are the plural forms of the two adjectives *sājid* (prostrating) and *qāʾim* (standing), respectively. "Before their Lord" qualifies "prostrating."[1] What is meant is that they worship God by prostrating themselves on the ground as well as standing on their feet. A clear example of this would be the daily prayer (*ṣalāh*).

The meaning of the verse is: "The believers pass the night in the states of prostration and standing before their Lord, alternating between the two." It could be that this expression specifically refers to observing the night vigil by performing the recommended night prayer (*ṣalāt al-layl*).

وَ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا اصْرِفْ عَنَّا عَذابَ جَهَنَّمَ إِنَّ عَذابَها كانَ غَراماً ﴿٦٥﴾

(25:65) *And they who say: O our Lord! Turn away from us the punishment of hell, surely the punishment thereof is enduring*

1 In other words, even though *li-Rabbihim* precedes *sujjadan* in the verse, it should be interpreted otherwise. It means that "they prostrate to God, or before God, or for God." Since the entire verse is a single sentence with a single theme, this qualification can be extended to the other parts of the verse: Their entire nighttime and what they do in it—including their prostration and standing—is dedicated to God. (Trans.)

(gharāman).

Gharām means "a difficulty or affliction that strikes a person, remains with him, and does not leave him." The rest is clear.

إِنَّها ساءَتْ مُسْتَقَرًّا وَ مُقاماً ﴿٦٦﴾

(25:66) ***Surely it is an evil abode*** **(mustaqqaran)** ***and an (evil) place to stay*** **(muqāman).**

In this verse, the pronoun "it" refers to hell [mentioned in the last verse]. *Mustaqarr* and *muqām* are locative nouns derived from *istiqrār* (to settle, to be established) and *iqāmah* (to stay, to stand).[1] The rest is clear. (25:66)

وَ الَّذِينَ إِذا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَ لَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَ كانَ بَيْنَ ذلِكَ قَواماً ﴿٦٧﴾

(25:67) ***And they who when they spend*** **(anfaqū, from infāq),** ***are neither extravagant*** **(yusrifū, from isrāf)** ***nor parsimonious*** **(yaqturū, from iqtār),** ***and (keep) between these the just mean*** **(qawāman).**

Infāq means "to spend and utilize money to fulfill the needs of oneself or others." *Isrāf* is "to go beyond the limits, on the excess side." In expenditure, *isrāf* means spending more than the amount that one should allocate to something. According to al-Rāghib, *qatr* means "spending little," which is the opposite of *isrāf*. The words *qatr*, *iqtār* and *taqtīr* are synonymous.

Qawām means "middle, balanced, just." *Qiwām* is "that by which something stands." In the verse, "between these" describes and complements *qawāman* [although it is mentioned before *qawāman*]. The meaning is: The believers' spending follows a just and golden mean between the two extremes of extravagance and parsimony.

… and (keep) between these the just mean: This sentence explicitly affirms the implied meaning of: *when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious*. Therefore, the first part of the verse negates the two extremes of either sides, and the last part of the verse confirms the middle path.

وَ الَّذِينَ لا يَدْعُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلهاً آخَرَ وَ لا يَقْتُلُونَ النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلاَّ بِالْحَقِّ وَ لا يَزْنُونَ وَ مَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذلِكَ يَلْقَ أَثاماً ﴿٦٨﴾

(25:68) ***And they who do not call upon another god with Allah and***

1 Therefore *mustaqarr* means "place of residence" and *muqām* means "place of stay." (Trans.)

do not slay the soul, which Allah has forbidden except for just cause, and (who) do not commit adultery; and he who does this shall meet a requital of sin.

This verse refers to *shirk* (polytheism, idolatry, associating others with God). However, idolatry does not allow calling to God, whether *alone* or *along with* other gods. Instead, idolatry instructs the people to invoke the other, lower gods. Idolaters worship these gods so that they may bring their worshipers closer to God and intercede for the worshipers before Him. Therefore, "calling upon another god *with* God" may allude to one of the following points:

Everybody already calls unto God at all times, according to their innate human nature (*fiṭrah*). Thus, if one calls upon other gods [at other times], then it will automatically be another god *along with Him*, even though the person may not explicitly call God [in an open and ritualistic way].

God is already there and exists by Himself, whether one calls upon the other gods or not. Therefore, "calling upon another god *with* God" means "calling upon other gods, *given* God's existence." In other words, it means leaving Him and calling others [while He is there].

The Arab polytheists believed that the land is governed by their gods, while the sea is governed by God, Who is in charge of the sea alone, without having any partners. Therefore, the verse refers to their custom of calling upon God in certain cases—like storms and other problems in the sea—and calling upon other gods in other cases—on land.

The second view is the most plausible one.

… and do not slay the soul, which Allah has forbidden except for just cause…: The believers do not kill human souls—which God has forbidden at all times, except in cases when it is rightful to do so, such as killing a soul for retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*) or legal penalty (*ḥadd*).[1]

… and (who) do not commit adultery…: The believers do not commit unlawful sexual intercourse. This was common among Arabs before Islam, but Islam was ever known for forbidding adultery and wine from the beginning of its call [in Mecca].

***… and he who does this* (dhālika) *shall meet a requital of sin* (athāman):** The demonstrative pronoun "this" (*dhālika*) refers to all of the previously mentioned acts: polytheism, killing an innocent soul unjustly, and adultery. *Athām* is synonymous with *ithm*, which means "the consequence of sin." It

1 *Qiṣāṣ* refers to deliberate murder, and *ḥadd* refers to certain sins which have the capital punishment. See verses 2:178, 2:194, 5:32-33, 5:45, 6:151 and 17:33. (Trans.)

refers to the punishment that the sinners face in the hereafter, as described in the next verse.

يُضاعَفْ لَهُ الْعَذابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيامَةِ وَ يَخْلُدْ فِيهِ مُهاناً ﴿٦٩﴾

(25:69) ***The punishment shall be doubled to him on the day of resurrection, and he shall abide therein in abasement.***

This verse describes and elaborates the "meeting of the consequence of sin (*athām*)," which was mentioned at the end of the last verse.

… and he shall abide therein in abasement: The disbelievers will be punished forever while they are covered by humiliation.

Eternal punishment for polytheism is certain. However, the Qur'an also clearly affirms eternal punishment [as seen in these verses] for committing adultery and for killing an innocent soul,[1] which are among the major sins in Islam. The same is true about taking usury.[2] Here are three possible explanations for these verses:

(1) These verses refer to the *nature* of these sins. They are such vices that call for eternal punishment in and of themselves [not taking into account the belief or disbelief of their doer]. This interpretation may also be deduced from the apparent meaning of the following verse: *Surely Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and He forgives what is besides this to whom He wills* (4:48, 4:116).[3]

(2) *Khulūd* (abidance, perpetuity, eternity) can be interpreted as "a long stay," including both permanent and impermanent.

(3) "*He who does this*" (25:68) refers to committing all three sins. After all, the verse's message is that the believers [overall] are clear from the acts that are found among disbelievers [collectively], which consists of all three acts, not just one.

إِلاَّ مَنْ تابَ وَ آمَنَ وَ عَمِلَ عَمَلاً صالِحاً فَأُوْلئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئاتِهِمْ حَسَناتٍ وَ كانَ اللَّهُ غَفُوراً رَحِيماً ﴿٧٠﴾

1 In addition to the current verses, eternal punishment for deliberately killing an innocent believer is mentioned in verse 4:93. (Trans.)

2 See verse 2:275. (Trans.)

3 The apparent sense of this statement is that there could also be other sins that God does not forgive. Murder, adultery and usury could be some examples of this. Therefore, these sins by themselves deserve eternal punishment, but that is still subject to God's will. (Trans.)

(25:70) ***Except him who repents and believes and does a good deed; so these are they for whom Allah changes their evils into good; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.***

The exception mentioned in this verse applies to "meeting the requital of sin" (25:68) and "staying therein forever" (25:69). The exception is conditional on repentance, belief, and doing good deeds. Repentance means to stop sinning, and its lowest degree is regret. That is a necessary condition for a servant to desist from sinning; otherwise, one will continues one's old practices. Performing righteous deeds is what makes repentance firm, established and sincere.

Since one of the conditions mentioned in this verse is *īmān* (belief, faith), it shows that this verse is specifically about repentance from polytheism. Thus, the verse can concern those who commit all of the three sins mentioned above (setting partners with God, killing an innocent soul, and committing adultery). Another possibility is that the verse only concerns those who set partners with God, regardless of committing any of the other two sins. As with those who commit murder and/or adultery but not polytheism, their repentance is explained in the next verse.

***… so these* (fa-ulāʾika) *are they for whom Allah changes their evils* (sayyiʾāt) *into good* (ḥasanāt)…:** The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this sentence shows that what is mentioned here is a consequence of their repentance, belief and righteous deeds. It describes the good result that follows because of doing these things, which is that God will turn their evil into good.

Some suggested interpretations for this change of deeds are:

God will erase their previous disobedience because of their repentance, and in place of their disobedience, He will write their following obedience. For instance, He replaces their disbelief by belief, their unjust killing by jihad and rightful killing, and their adultery by chastity and abstention.[1]

The verse does not mean that "evil" is literally turned into "good," but what is meant is evil and good *malakah* (habit, second nature). While they had developed an evil second nature, God will change it into a good second nature.[2]

What is meant by "evil" and "good" is the *punishments and rewards* of evil and good; otherwise, evil is not transformed into good. For example,

1 This interpretation refers to the records of deeds. (Trans.)

2 This interpretation assumes the word *malakah* to be omitted and implied in the verse. (Trans.)

God will replace the punishment of murder and adultery with the reward of rightful killing and chastity.[1]

The reader would agree that these views turn the speech away from its apparent meaning, without any evidence to warrant it.

The apparent meaning of "*Allah changes their evils into good*," followed by "*and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful*," is that their actual evils will all be converted to good. It should be noted that a *sayyi'ah* (lit. "evil, vice, iniquity") is not the outward *action* that is performed by a doer, for the act itself is simply a set of movements that are common between vices and virtues. For example, sexual intercourse is equally found in adultery and in lawful mating. Similarly, taking one's possession is the same act, whether one usurps it or takes it with the owner's permission. Rather, what makes an act evil or good is whether or not it complies with God's commands. This aspect of compliance with God's will is what leaves its trace and impression in the soul and remains for the doer. Otherwise, the outward action—which consists of a set of temporary movements—disappears once it is done. And as the action disappears, its classification and label [as either evil or good] will also disappear. The punishment in the hereafter applies to the evil *effects, traces and impressions* of sins, which are imprinted on the soul and do not leave the person until he is taken by them: *on the day when the secrets are examined* (86:9).

These inner traces and impressions will in turn form the person's actions.[2] That is, if one's essence is completely free from the mix of evil and wickedness, then the person will not commit any evil deeds. A virtuous essence that is pure in every aspect cannot bring forth evil and foul actions. Evil acts necessarily emanate from an essence that is either, *completely* evil and wicked, or has *some* mix of evil and wickedness.

Now, consider a person whose essence is purified and made good through repentance, belief and good deeds, such that it turns into a virtuous essence without any mix of defilement and wickedness. What is compatible with such a soul is good traces and impressions. Therefore, as the essence is transformed, the traces and impressions that it bears will also transform accordingly, because they are inseparable effects of the soul. The evil that was found in the person was because of his essence; now that his essence is good and pure, its effects will follow accordingly. This transformation will be by God's forgiveness and mercy: *and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful* (25:70).

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1 This interpretation assumes "punishment" and "reward" to be omitted and implied in the verse. (Trans.)

2 That is, the relationship between the actions and the soul is reciprocal. (Trans.)

Perhaps the verse refers to something along these lines.[1]

وَ مَنْ تابَ وَ عَمِلَ صالِحاً فَإِنَّهُ يَتُوبُ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَتاباً ﴿٧١﴾

(25:71) ***And whoever repents and does good, he surely turns to Allah a (goodly) turning*** **(matāban).**

Matāb is a verbal noun for the act of *tawbah* (repentance, returning). Given the context of the verses, this verse says that it is not surprising when evil deeds are converted into good deeds, because of the significance and greatness of repentance. It is a special and goodly returning to God, so it is no wonder that God changes the person's evil deeds into good ones. He is God, Who does what He wills.

At the same time, this verse applies to repentance from all sins, whether they are coupled with polytheism or not. The last verse, as we noted above, hardly alludes to sins that are not accompanied by polytheism.[2]

وَ الَّذِينَ لا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ وَ إِذا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِراماً ﴿٧٢﴾

(25:72) ***And they who do not witness falsehood*** **(al-zūr),** ***and when they pass by what is vain, they pass by nobly*** **(kirāman).**

Majmaʿ al-bayān says, "*Zūr* originally means presenting falsehood in a way that it looks like truth." Therefore, *zūr* would include lying, as well as false vanities like singing (*ghināʾ*), profanity and swearing, in one way or another. *Majmaʿ al-bayān* also says, "The verb *takarrama* is used when one honors oneself by keeping away from something disgraceful."

And they who do not witness falsehood…: If *zūr* means "lying," then *zūr* would represent an omitted verbal noun as the object of the verb "witness." The implied meaning would be: "The believers do not witness to a false testimony" [where the word "testimony" (*shahādah*) is omitted in the verse].

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1 The English translations of the Qur'an have translated *sayyiʾāt* and *ḥasanāt* in this verse as "evil deeds" and "good deeds," respectively. This assumes that "evil" and "good" are primarily the attribute of deeds. The author's unique observation is that actions themselves are neither good nor bad; nor do they persist to be rewarded or penalized. The verse says "*their* evil." The author has taken this ascription to be a subtle reference to the evil of their essence, which is the *effects and impressions* that actions leave in the person's soul. It is these traces that are converted, by God's mercy and forgiveness, as the essence is purified. (Trans.)

2 In other words, the current verse is more general and comprehensive than the previous verse. (Trans.)

If *zūr* means "false vanities like singing and the like," then *zūr* would itself be the object of witnessing. The meaning would be: "The believers do not attend vain gatherings." The subsequent part of the verse is more consonant with the second meaning.

… and when they pass by what is vain **(bil-laghw)*****, they pass by nobly:*** The word *laghw* is used for "any action or speech that is not worthy of attention because of lacking a rational objective." Thus, as it is said, *laghw* would include all sins. "Passing by vanity" means passing by those who engage in vanity while they are engaged in it.

The meaning is: When the special servants of God come across those who are engaged in idleness and vanity, they pass by them in aversion, keeping themselves clear from entering among them, mixing with them, and joining their party.

وَ الَّذِينَ إِذا ذُكِّرُوا بِآياتِ رَبِّهِمْ لَمْ يَخِرُّوا عَلَيْها صُمًّا وَ عُمْياناً ﴿٧٣﴾

(25:73) ***And they who, when reminded of the communications of their Lord, do not fall down thereat*** **(lam yakhirrū ʿalayhā, from khurūr)** ***deaf and blind.***

"*Khurūr* upon the ground" means "falling on the ground." Here, it is apparently a metaphorical expression for sticking to something and jumping on it. The meaning is: When the believers are reminded by the communications and revelations of their Lord—such as the wisdoms and fair exhortations of the Qur'an—they do not fall on it deaf and blind, not hearing or seeing. Instead, they contemplate it, understand it, and accept it out of insight. They believe in its wisdom, take heed of its admonitions, have a clear vision of their path, and follow the solid proof from their Lord.

وَ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنا هَبْ لَنا مِنْ أَزْواجِنا وَ ذُرِّيَّاتِنا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَ اجْعَلْنا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِماماً ﴿٧٤﴾

(25:74) ***And they who say: O our Lord! Grant us in our wives and our offspring the joy of our eyes*** **(qurrata aʿyun)*****, and make us a leader to those who guard (against evil).***

Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufradāt*:

> *Qarrat* or *taqarra ʿaynuhu* (lit. "his eye was cooled") is said when one is pleased and happy. God says: *That her eye might be cooled* (taqarra ʿaynuhā) (20:40). *Qurrat ʿayn* is what makes one happy and pleased. God says [narrating from Pharaoh's wife about Moses]: *A*

refreshment of the eye (qurrat ʿayn) *to me and to you* (28:9), and: *Grant us in our wives and our offspring the joy of our eyes* (qurrata aʿyun) (25:74).

It is said that the expression *qurrat ʿayn* is derived from the root *qarr*, meaning *bard* (coolness, cold). Therefore, *qarrat ʿaynuhu* is interpreted as "his eye was cooled and healed." About the provenance of this expression, some have said that joy is accompanied by coolness and cold tears, while sorrow is accompanied by warmth and hot tears. That is why when they wants to curse someone, they say, "May God make his eye hot." Others have said that the expression is derived from the root *qarār* (settlement, establishment, fixedness). It means that God would give a person something that makes his eyes calm and settled, such that he no longer looks at what others have covetously.

The special servants of God wish their wives and offspring to be the joy of their eyes. That is, they want their family to please them by being obedient to God and refraining from His disobedience. That is their sole concern and request, because they are not followers of desires, but they only care about the truth.

… and make us a leader to those who guard (against evil) **(lil-muttaqīn imāman)*:*** That is: "Make us rush toward good and strive for Your mercy, such that the other *muttaqūn* (those who guard against evil, the Godwary, the self-restrained) would follow us." This would refer to the following instructions of God: *Therefore hasten to (do) good works* (2:148), *Hasten to forgiveness from your Lord* (57:21), and: *And the foremost are the foremost; these are they who are drawn near (to Allah)* (56:10-11). In this prayer, the word *imām* (leader, guide, model) is mentioned in singular form. This apparently shows that they want to be all united in one line, ahead of other *muttaqūn*.

Here are some alternative interpretations offered by the exegetes: (1) *Imām* is used for both singular and plural.[1] (2) *Imām* is the plural of *āmm*, meaning "one who is aiming and heading [for a destination]," much like *ṣiyām*, which is the plural of *ṣāʾim* (one who is fasting). The meaning would then be: "Make us followers who head toward those who guard against evil." (3) A recitation by Ahl al-Bayt reads: "Make for us a leader from those who guard against evil" (*wa-ijʿal lanā min al-muttaqīna imāman*).

أُوْلٰٓئِكَ يُجْزَوْنَ الْغُرْفَةَ بِما صَبَرُوا وَ يُلَقَّوْنَ فِيها تَحِيَّةً وَ سَلاماً ﴿٧٥﴾ خالِدِينَ

1 The meaning would be: "Make us leaders for the Godwary." (Trans.)

فِيها حَسُنَتْ مُسْتَقَرًّا وَ مُقاماً ﴿٧٦﴾

(25:75-76) ***These shall be rewarded with high places*** **(al-ghurfah)** ***because they were patient, and shall be met therein with greetings*** **(taḥiyyatan)** ***and salutations*** **(salāman).** ***Abiding therein; goodly the abode and the resting-place.***

Ghurfah is defined as "a structure that is built upon another." In other words, it is the higher part of a house. In this verse, it would refer to an exalted rank in Paradise. *Taḥiyyah* is "a pleasant message of welcome." *Salām* means "anything that is free from what one fears or avoids." The indefinite form of these two words indicates magnification and aggrandizement. In this verse, "patience" specifically includes two types of patience: (1) having patience in performing acts of obedience; and (2) having patience in abstaining from acts of disobedience. This interpretation is based on the previous verses, which specifically discussed these two types of patience. Nevertheless, these two types of patience are not separable from having patience during difficulties and tribulations.[1]

The meaning of the first verse [25:75] is: "These people, who were described above, will be rewarded with high ranks in Paradise, and the angels will meet them there with greetings and salutations." The meaning of the second verse [25:76] should be clear.

قُلْ ما يَعْبَؤُا بِكُمْ رَبِّي لَوْ لا دُعاؤُكُمْ فَقَدْ كَذَّبْتُمْ فَسَوْفَ يَكُونُ لِزاماً ﴿٧٧﴾

(25:77) ***Say: My Lord would not care*** **(yaʿbaʾu, from ʿibʾ)** ***for you were it not for your calling; for you have indeed*** **(fa-qad)** ***rejected (the truth), so that shall be binding.***

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Mā ʿabaʾtu bihi* means "I do not care about it." It is derived from *ʿibʾ*, which means *thiql* (weight, heaviness). It is as if one is saying, "I do not see it having any weight or worth." God says: *Say: My Lord would not care for you were it not for your calling* (25:77). Some have said that this verb [*ʿabaʾa yaʿbaʾu ʿabʾan*] is derived from

1 This is based on several narrations that classify patience into three types: (1) being patient during afflictions; (2) being patient with God's obedience; and (3) being patient in avoiding sins. (Trans.)

the expression, *ʿabaʾtu al-ṭīb* (I prepared the fragrance); as if the verse is saying, "My Lord would not spare you if it were not for your calling."[1]

It is said that in the phrase "your calling" (*duʿāʾukum*), *duʿāʾ* is a verbal noun (call, calling) which has been annexed to the *object* of the call [not to the subject]. The subject who makes this call is "my Lord." Therefore, "*for you have indeed rejected*" is the reason which clarifies the first part of the verse as its consequence.[2]

… so that shall be binding: That is: Your act of denial shall stick and bind to you closely; it will not leave you until you meet its consequence of everlasting punishment and inseparable wretchedness.

The meaning of the verse is: "You have no value or position in the sight of my Lord, meaning that your existence and non-existence is equal to Him. This is because you have denied [His communications] to the point that there is no hope of good in you, and this denial shall soon cling to you closely. If God calls you [to the truth and His religion] it is only because He wants to complete His proof and argument against you, or so that you may turn back from your denial." This is a plausible interpretation of the verse.

It is also said that in the phrase "your calling" (*duʿāʾukum*), *duʿāʾ* is a verbal noun which has been annexed to the subject [that is, the caller]. Therefore, "your calling" means the believers' worship of God. The verse would then mean: My Lord would not care for you—or He would not spare you—if it were not for your worship of Him.

However, this interpretation does not comply with the letter *fāʾ* (lit. "so, thus, then") in the next part of the verse: "*for you have indeed rejected* (fa-qad)," because this letter implies consequence and conclusion (*tafarruʿ*, *tafrīʿ*). If the above meaning were intended, the verse should have used the conjunction "and" (*wāw*) instead. Moreover, annexing a verbal noun to the subject implies that the act has already taken place, which was not the case when the verse was revealed, because the audience of the verse [that is, the polytheists in Mecca] did not use to worship God and call Him. So if that were the intended meaning, the verse should have said, "were it not for you to call Him" (*law lā an tadʿūhu*).[3] The reader should reflect on this.

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1 In other words, He would not attend to your affair and growth as one would attend to the preparation and production of something. (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: My Lord does not care about you except that He wants to call you; and the reason why He has no regard for you is that you have rejected. (Trans.)

3 In other words, the verse should have used a present tense verb instead of a

This is the ending verse of this sūrah, which refers to the main theme of the entire sūrah and summarizes it. The sūrah was about the polytheists' objection and denial against God's Messenger and the Qur'an that was revealed to him.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning "*they who walk on the earth in humbleness*" (25:63) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It means walking normally in one's natural manner, in a way that is neither pretentious nor proud.[1]

(2) Concerning the word *gharām* in the verse "*surely the punishment thereof is* gharāman" (25:65) the Messenger of God said: [It means] *dāʾim* (permanent, persistent, enduring).[2]

(3) Concerning "*surely the punishment thereof is* gharāman" (25:65) Imam al-Bāqir said, [*Gharām* means] binding and inseparable.[3]

(4) Concerning "*And they who when they spend, are neither extravagant* (lam yusrifū, from isrāf) *nor parsimonious*" (25:67) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says, "*Isrāf* means spending unlawfully in an unjust cause." Concerning "*nor parsimonious* (lam yaqturū)" (25:67) it says, "[It means] they are not stingy in paying God's due." Concerning "*and (keep) between these* qawāman" (25:67) it says, "*Qawām* means *ʿadl* (balance, justice); that is, spending in causes that God has ordered."[4]

(5) Concerning "*and (keep) between these the just mean*" (25:67) Imam al-Kāẓim said: This is about doing good and charity; "*the wealthy according to his means and the straitened according to his means*" (2:236), where one's "means" is proportionate to one's family and dependants. That is, they do good according to the needs and expenses of themselves and their families. *Allah does not lay on any soul a burden except to the extent to which He has granted it* (65:7).[5]

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verbal noun. In that case, the meaning would be: "My Lord does not care about you unless you start calling Him." (Trans.)

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

4 The author has taken this to be a continuation of Imam al-Bāqir's hadith, but apparently it is Qummī's interpretation. (Trans.)

5 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Sinān.

(6) It is narrated that once Muʿādh asked the Messenger of God about this [verse 25:67]. The Prophet explained: Whoever gives in an unjust cause is extravagant, and whoever refrains from paying a right is parsimonious.[1]

Author's comment: There are very many narrations to this effect.

(7) Ibn Masʿūd said: Once I asked[2] the Prophet, "What is the greatest sin?" He said, "To set a counterpart for God—while He [is the One Who] has created you." I asked, "Then what?" He said, "To kill your child fearing that he would eat from your share [and reduce your sustenance]." I asked, "Then what?" He said, "To commit adultery with your neighbor's wife."[3] Then, God confirmed that by revealing: *And they who do not call upon another god with Allah and do not slay the soul, which Allah has forbidden except for just cause, and (who) do not commit adultery* (25:68).[4]

Author's comment: Perhaps what is meant is that this account matches and conforms to this verse, not that the narration was a cause of the revelation of the verse.

(8) Concerning "*Allah changes their evils into good*" (25:70) ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn said, "That occurs in the hereafter."[5]

(9) Concerning the same verse, al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] said, "That occurs in this world."[6]

(10) The Messenger of God said: On the Day of Resurrection, a man will be brought forth and it will be said [to his guardian angels], "Show him his minor sins." "On such-and-such a day," he will be told, "you did such-and-such an act…"; thus his minor sins will be shown to him one after another, while his major sins are not spoken of. He will admit to them all, and does not deny anything, but he will be constantly worried about when the angels would pull out his major

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 In some narrations the inquirer is Ibn Masʿūd; in some narrations he relates the questions of someone else; and in some narrations the two are mixed. (Trans.)

3 The three sins mentioned in this verse (25:68), especially as worded in this hadith, are evocative of the Ten Commandments, as found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Fāryābī, Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī's *Shuʿab al-īmān*.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd.

6 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd.

sins. However, it will then be said [to his angels], "In place of every sin that he committed, give him a good deed."[1]

Author's comment: This is one of the numreous narrations about the conversion of evil deeds to good ones on the Day of Resurrections. These narrations are multiple (*mustafiḍah*),[2] reported through both Sunni and Shia chains of transmission, from the Prophet and from Imams al-Bāqir, al-Ṣādiq and al-Riḍā.

(11) The Messenger of God said: Whenever a group of people gathers in a sitting to remember God, an announcer will call them from the heaven: "Now you may get up [and start afresh], for indeed God has changed your evil deeds to good ones; He has forgiven you all."[3]

(12) Concerning "*who do not witness* al-zūr" (25:72) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: [*Zūr* means] *ghināʾ* (singing).[4]

Author's comment: *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says that this has been narrated from both Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq. Al-Qummī has also narrated it twice, once with a chain of transmission, and once without.[5]

(13) Muḥammad b. Abī ᶜAbbād was known for enjoying *samāᶜ* (song, music, dance) and alcohol. He says: I once asked al-Riḍā about *samāᶜ*. He said, "The people of Hijaz have their own opinion about it, but it is an example of *bāṭil* (falsehood, vanity, futility) and *lahw* (distraction, diversion). Have you not heard that God says: *and when they pass by what is vain* (al-laghw),[6] *they pass by nobly*

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, Hannād, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Asmāʾ wa al-ṣifāt*, on the authority of Abū Dharr.

2 A tradition is called *mustafiḍah* (multiple, diffused, numerous) if it is narrated through at least three chains of transmission, strengthening the likelihood of its authenticity. It is one degree below *mutawātir* traditions (mass-transmitted, repeatedly reported, recurrent), which are narrated through so many chains of transmission that leaves no doubt as to their authenticity. (Trans.)

3 *Rawḍat al-wāᶜiẓīn*.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū al-Ṣabāḥ.

5 Apparently al-Qummī's narration with a connected chain of transmission (*musnad*) is what he has narrated under verse 22:30 about *qawl a-zūr* (false words). His "narration" with an incomplete chain of transmission (*mursal*) would be his interpretation of verse 25:72, which the author has taken to be a continuation of Imam al-Bāqir's hadith on the authority of Abū Jārūd. This is part of narration number 4 above. (Trans.)

6 This hadith suggests that *laghw* (vanity, futility) is synonymous with *lahw* (distraction, diversion)—at least in this verse—because the Imam has used them interchangeably. (Trans.)

(25:72)?"[1]

(14) Abū Baṣīr says: I once asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about God's words, "*And they who, when reminded of the communications of their Lord, do not fall down thereat deaf and blind*" (25:73). He said, "[It means that] they are insightful and certain, not doubtful [about God's communications]."[2]

(15) Concerning "*and make us a leader to those who guard (against evil)*" (25:74) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: This refers to us [Ahl al-Bayt].[3]

Author's comment: There are more narrations to this effect. There are also some narrations where the Ahl al-Bayt recite the verse as follows: *wa-ijʿal lanā min al-muttaqīna imāman* (make for us a leader from those who guard against evil).

(16) Concerning "*These shall be rewarded with high places because they were patient*" (25:75) Imam al-Bāqir said: This refers to being patient with poverty in this world.[4]

(17) Imam al-Bāqir was once asked, "Is it better to recite the Qur'an more or to make more supplication (*duʿā'*)?" He said, "It is better to make more supplication." Then, he recited this verse [25:7] as evidence.[5]

Author's comment: It is unclear how the verse applies to this narration.

18. Concerning verse 25:77 (*Say: My Lord would not care for you were it not for your calling*) Imam al-Bāqir said: The verse is saying, "What should my Lord do to you?[6] *For you have indeed rejected (the truth), so that shall be binding*."[7]

End of Chapter 25 & Volume

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1 *ʿUyūn-i Akhbār al-Riḍā*, via its chain of narration.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

3 *Jawāmiʿ al-jāmiʿ*.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Abū Nuʿaym's *al-Ḥilyah*.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ʿAyyāshī, on the authority of Burayd b. Muʿawiyah al-ʿIjlī.

6 In other words, "What do you expect from God, given your defiance and denial?" (Trans.)

7 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.